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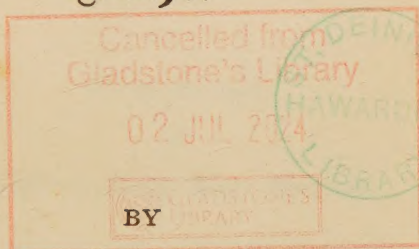






THE NINETEENTH HARTLEY LECTURE :

# The Revelation of John



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LONDON :

JOSEPH JOHNSON,

PRIMITIVE METHODIST PUBLISHING HOUSE,

HOLBORN HALL, CLERKENWELL ROAD, E.C.1.

1919.



TO THE MEMORY

OF


Professor James Hope Moulton,

DEAR FRIEND AND HONOURED COLLEAGUE,

I DEDICATE THIS VOLUME

IN PROUD AND SORROWFUL REMEMBRANCE

IN THE PATIENCE AND CONSOLATION OF HOPE.



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## PREFACE.

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THE present volume owes its origin to an accident. The Hartley Lecture for 1919 should have been delivered by the Rev. A. T. Guttery. In consequence of his acceptance of an important Government mission to America, and the burden imposed by the Presidency of the National Free Church Council, he felt that it would be better to postpone his lecture. Accordingly I was invited to take his place and Dr. Guttery is to deliver the lecture in 1920. This request was made to me late in October, 1918. I was very heavily overburdened at the time, but felt it my duty to accept the call of my Church, especially since Hartley College had for some time been closed. Little could be done at the book before Christmas, but it seemed possible to complete it by the end of March. Illness and the unexpected reopening of Hartley College prevented this; all the more that University work had continued

without interruption, and that the Commentary on the Bible I had so long been editing was not finally dismissed till May. The book could not be completed till the end of July, since the new duties involved in the Editorship of the *Holborn Review* cut deeply into my time.

It had never been my intention to write a book on the Revelation of John, but I chose this subject, as one suitable for the purpose, timely in the present conditions, and sufficiently familiar to warrant the hope that I could complete the task in the allotted time.

Till 1904 I had done little at the Revelation of John beyond keeping in general touch with its criticism and interpretation. This was partly occasioned by reluctance to grapple more closely with its problems, when so much remained to be done elsewhere. I included it in the optional subjects set for special study in the course for the Manchester B.D., hoping that Dr. Moulton would lecture on it. Though he was attracted by the proposal, other claims made this impossible. It thus became my duty to take up the difficult but fascinating task. At that time we had in English the older commentaries of Bleek, Alford, Lee, and Simcox, and the more recent and excellent work

of Dr. Anderson Scott in the Century Bible. Harnack's article in the ninth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* gave a good statement of the position as it existed when the analytic criticism was just appearing above the horizon. Bousset's article in the *Encyclopædia Biblica* summarised the results of his Commentary, while the comprehensive and valuable article of Prof. Porter in Hastings' *Dictionary* was supplemented by his *Messages of the Apocalyptic Writers*. My own debt was chiefly to Bousset's Commentary, to the discussions by Spitta, J. Weiss and Gunkel, to the second edition of Pfleiderer's *Urchristentum* and to Sir William Ramsay's *Letters to the Seven Churches*. It was not till later that the commentaries by Dr. Swete, J. Weiss and Dr. Moffatt appeared, and the second edition of Bousset's commentary. All of these have enriched our knowledge, and to all I desire to express my obligation. The long-expected commentary by Canon Charles is happily announced for near publication, but his *Studies in the Apocalypse*, and his article in the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, together with earlier writings, among which his invaluable editions of apocalyptic books should specially be mentioned, have made his general position clear.

The present work falls into two Parts. The former deals with more general questions of criticism, history, interpretation and theology. The latter gives an exposition of each section of the Apocalypse, closing with a chapter on its permanent value. Since it has been and still is the subject of radically divergent interpretations, it seemed well to investigate these more fully than would otherwise have been necessary ; but it did not appear desirable to encumber the volume with detailed refutations of views which cannot be true if the principles on which they rest are false. That these principles should be rejected, has been argued in a chapter specially devoted to this topic. The great vogue given to "continuous-historical" interpretations by the European war makes it a matter of duty to explain why this whole system is to be repudiated both in principle and in detail and in all its forms.

My thanks are due to Messrs. Hodder and Stoughton for permission, most cordially granted, to use the article on "The Person of Christ in the Revelation of John" contributed to Mansfield College Essays presented to Dr. Fairbairn.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.

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- AJTh. .... *American Journal of Theology.*  
 AV ..... *The Authorised Version.*  
 Abbott ..... *Notes on NT Criticism (= Diatessarica—  
 Part vii.), 1907.*  
 Alford ..... H. Alford. *The Greek Testament*, vol. iv.  
 Bacon FG ..... B. W. Bacon. *The Fourth Gospel in Research  
 and Debate (1910).*  
 Bacon MNT ..... B. W. Bacon. *The Making of the NT.*  
 Baur CH ..... F. C. Baur. *The Church History of the First  
 Three Centuries.*  
 Baur Evangelien F. C. Baur. *Kritische Untersuchungen über  
 die kanonischen Evangelien (1847).*  
 Baur NTTh..... F. C. Baur. *Vorlesungen über Neutestament-  
 liche Theologie (1864).*  
 Benson ..... E. W. Benson. *The Apocalypse (1900).*  
 Beyschlag ..... W. Beyschlag. *New Testament Theology  
 (1895).*  
 Bleek ..... F. Bleek. *Lectures on the Apocalypse (1875).*  
 Bousset Off. J. .... W. Bousset. *Die Offenbarung Johannis (1st  
 ed. 1896, 2nd ed. 1906).*  
 Bousset RJ ..... W. Bousset. *Die Religion des Judentums<sup>2</sup>  
 (1906).*  
 Bovon ..... J. Bovon. *La Théologie du Nouveau Testa-  
 ment.*  
 Briggs ..... A. Briggs. *The Messiah of the Apostles (1895).*  
 CGT ..... *The Cambridge Greek Testament.*  
 Cent. B. .... *The Century Bible.*  
 Charles Studies . . . R. H. Charles. *Studies in the Apocalypse  
 (1913).*

- Clemen PCNS ...C. Clemen. *Primitive Christianity and its Non-Jewish Sources* (1912).
- Davidson, S. INT S. Davidson. *An Introduction to the Study of the New Testament* (1st ed. 1848-1851, 2nd ed., 3rd ed. 1894).
- EBi.....*Encyclopædia Biblica.*
- EBr. ....*Encyclopædia Britannica.*
- EGT .....*Expositor's Greek Testament.*
- ERE.....Hastings' *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics.*
- Edmundson.....Edmundson. *The Church in Rome in the First Century* (1913).
- Elliott .....Elliott. *Horæ Apocalypticæ*<sup>3</sup> (1847).
- Eusebius HE ....Eusebius. *Ecclesiastical History.*
- Exp. ....*Expositor.*
- Farrar .....F. W. Farrar. *The Early Days of Christianity* (1882).
- Geil.....Geil. *The Isle that is Called Patmos.*
- Godet .....F. Godet. *Studies on the NT* (1890).
- Gressmann .....*Der Ursprung der israelitisch-jüdischen Eschatologie* (1905).
- Grotius *Annot.*  
*de Antichristo* ..H. Grotius. *Annotationes de Antichristo.*
- Gunkel RVNT ...Gunkel. *Zum religionsgeschichtlichen Verständnis des Neuen Testaments* (1903).
- Gunkel SC .....Gunkel. *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit* (1895).
- Hammond .....Hammond. *A Paraphrase and Annotations upon the New Testament* (Fourth Edition).
- Harnack CAL....A. Harnack. *Die Chronologie der altchristlichen Litteratur* Band i. (1897).
- Harnack EBr<sup>9</sup> ...A. Harnack. *Article Revelation* in 9th edition of EBr.
- Harnack MEC..A. Harnack. *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries* (1908).  
 [see also Vischer]
- Henderson .....B. W. Henderson. *The Life and Principate of the Emperor Nero* (1903).
- Hilgenfeld .....A. Hilgenfeld. *Historisch-Kritische Einleitung in das Neue Testament* (1875).

- Holtzmann-Bauer *Handcommentar zum Neuen Testament: Vierter Band. Evangelium Briefe und Offenbarung des Johannes* bearbeitet von H. J. Holtzmann. Dritte Auflage besorgt von W. Bauer (1908).
- Hort ..... F. J. A. Hort. *The Apocalypse of St. John I.-III.* (1908).
- Huschke ..... E. Huschke. *Das Buch mit sieben Siegeln* (1860).
- INT ..... *Introduction to the New Testament.*
- JBL ..... *Journal of Biblical Literature.*
- JTS ..... *Journal of Theological Studies.*
- Knopf ..... R. Knopf. *Das nachapostolische Zeitalter* (1905).
- Milligan  
     *Discussions..* W. Milligan. *Discussions on the Apocalypse* (1893).
- Milligan *Lectures..* W. Milligan. *Lectures on the Apocalypse* (1892).
- Milligan SPC..... W. Milligan. *Revelation in Schaff's Popular Commentary.*
- Moffatt EGT .... J. Moffatt. *Revelation in the Expositor's Greek Testament*, vol. v. (1910).
- Mommsen PRE .. T. Mommsen. *The Provinces of the Roman Empire<sup>2</sup>* (1909).
- Pfleiderer..... O. Pfleiderer. *Primitive Christianity* (1906-1911).
- Porter ..... F. C. Porter. *The Messages of the Apocalyptic Writers* (1905).
- RV ..... *The Revised Version.*
- Radermacher .... L. Radermacher. *Neutestamentliche Grammatik* (1911).
- Ramsay *Letters ..* W. M. Ramsay. *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia and their Place in the Plan of the Apocalypse* (1904).
- Renan ..... E. Renan. *L'Antechrist* (1873).
- Reuss CT..... E. Reuss. *History of Christian Theology in the Apostolic Age* (1872).
- Reuss HNT..... E. Reuss. *History of the Sacred Scriptures of the New Testament* (1884).
- Russell ..... J. Stuart Russell. *The Parousia: A Critical Inquiry into the New Testament Doctrine of our Lord's Second Coming* (1878).
- Schwegler ..... A. Schwegler. *Das nachapostolische Zeitalter* (1846).

- Scott .....C. A. Scott. *Revelation in The Century Bible.*
- Selwyn .....Selwyn. *The Christian Prophets and the Prophetic Apocalypse.*
- Simcox CGT ....Simcox. *Revelation in The Cambridge Greek Testament.*
- Spitta .....F. Spitta. *Die Offenbarung Johannis.*
- Swete .....H. B. Swete. *The Apocalypse of St. John* (1906).
- TLZ .....*Theologische Literaturzeitung.*
- TU .....*Texte und Untersuchungen.*
- Th.R .....*Theologische Rundschau.*
- Tozer .....Tozer. *The Isles of the Ægean.*
- Turner .....C. H. Turner. *Studies in Early Church History* (1912).
- Vischer.....E. Vischer. *Die Offenbarung Johannis : Eine jüdische Apokalypse in christlicher Bearbeitung, mit einem Nachwort von Adolf Harnack* (1886).
- Weinel .....*Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments.*
- Weiss, J. Off. ...J. Weiss. *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (1904).
- Weiss, J. SNT ..J. Weiss. *Offenbarung Johannis in Die Schriften des neuen Testaments.*
- Weizsäcker .....C. Weizsäcker. *The Apostolic Age.*
- Wellhausen  
     *Skizzen*.....J. Wellhausen. *Skizzen und Vorarbeiten*  
                                     Heft 6 (1899).
- Wellhausen  
     *Analyse* .....J. Wellhausen. *Analyse der Offenbarung*  
                                     *Johannis* (1907).
- Wendland HRK<sup>2</sup> P. Wendland. *Die Hellenistisch-Römische Kultur in ihren Beziehungen zu Judentum und Christentum*<sup>2</sup> (1912).
- Wendland ULF ..P. Wendland. *Die Urchristlichen Litteraturformen*<sup>2</sup> (1912).
- Wetstein .....Wetstein. *Novum Testamentum.*
- ZNTW .....*Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft.*
- ZWTh. ....*Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie.*
- Zahn.....T. Zahn. *Introduction to the New Testament.*



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PART I.





# THE REVELATION OF JOHN.

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## CHAPTER I.

### The Problems.

**I**N his *History of Christian Theology in the Apostolic Age* (i. 370), Reuss expressed a view of the Apocalypse which would have been shared by many scholars at the time. He said: "We boldly affirm that the study of this book would present absolutely no possibility of error if the inconceivable, often ridiculous, prejudices of theologians in all ages, had not so trammelled it, and made it bristle with difficulties, that most readers shrink from it in alarm. Apart from these preconceptions, the Revelation would be the most simple, most transparent book that prophet ever penned." Unfortunately, such optimism has for more than thirty years ceased to be possible, and many of the positions which were then thought

to be securely won have now been abandoned. The student has to thread a tangled maze in the pursuit of his goal, liable to be misled by false lights and to mistake blind alleys for the true path to the centre.

Yet it would be unjustifiable to leave the impression that the scholars for whom Reuss spoke were entirely on the wrong track and that no definite principles had been established or reasonably certain results attained. The affinities of the Book with apocalyptic literature had been recognized, its relation to the contemporary-historical situation had been correctly understood in the main, though probably misapprehended in important details, and the writer's object had been clearly perceived. It is nevertheless true that some of the old questions were incorrectly answered, and that new problems have emerged of which our predecessors did not even dream.

We may, perhaps, approach our task best by a brief survey of the problems with which we are confronted. There is first the question of authorship. The seer of Patmos describes himself as John. Christian tradition has generally identified him with the son of Zebedee, the Apostle John. But dissentient voices were raised in antiquity, and to-day a large number of scholars regard this identification as most improbable. Some accept the suggestion that the author was the Presbyter John mentioned by Papias in a much-debated

passage.<sup>1</sup> But since the name John was not uncommon it is thought by some that the prophet was an otherwise unknown John.

But why, it is asked, should he have really been named John at all? For the Book is an Apocalypse, and it is characteristic of apocalypses that they are pseudonymous, in other words that the revelation which they contain professes to be given by someone other than the actual writer. May not our Book have conformed to type in this respect, and the unknown author have published his revelation under a name which would carry a weight that his own name did not possess?

The matter is further complicated by the relation

<sup>1</sup> "And again on any occasion when a person came (in my way) who had been a follower of the Elders, I would inquire about the discourses of the Elders—what was said by Andrew, or by Peter, or by Philip, or by Thomas or James, or by John or Matthew or any other of the Lord's disciples, and what Aristion and the Elder John, the disciples of the Lord, say." (The passage is preserved in Eusebius, HE iii. 39. The translation is quoted from Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, p. 528.) The language is difficult to reconcile with the view of Zahn and others that the passage speaks of one John only, and that Papias knew of no Elder John as distinct from the apostle. Still the figure of the Elder is shadowy in the extreme, and it should be observed that Papias says nothing as to his place of residence. The view that he lived at Ephesus is quite possibly correct; but it is pure hypothesis, and Eusebius' confident corollary "he hereby makes it quite evident that their statement is true who say that there were two persons of that name in Asia, and that there are two tombs in Ephesus, each of which even now is called (the tomb) of John," quite outruns the evidence. Its motive is clear from the following sentence; the mention of two Johns supplies him with a welcome alternative to the apostolic authorship of the Revelation.

in which the Revelation stands to the other Johanne literature and especially to the Fourth Gospel Ecclesiastical tradition attributes the Gospel, the three Epistles and the Revelation to the Apostle. This finds little favour among scholars to-day. Indeed few will allow, with Harnack, that the five writings are the work of one hand, though the author be the Presbyter rather than the Apostle.<sup>1</sup> The majority are agreed that the author of the Gospel cannot have written the Apocalypse, and in particular that he cannot have done so if the traditional date of the Book is correct. If the Revelation belongs to the reign of Domitian, its author, it is said, cannot have written two works so different within so brief a period.

This brings us to the problem of the date. On the usual and probably correct interpretation of his words, Irenæus informs us that the Revelation was seen at the end of the reign of Domitian.<sup>2</sup> This date was accepted, with some dissentients, by scholars generally till comparatively recently. During a considerable part of the nineteenth century it was thought by a large number of scholars of different critical schools that a date before the destruction of Jerusalem could be taken as certain. But there has been a strong reaction against this, and contemporary criticism has largely returned to the traditional date.

<sup>1</sup> CAL p. 675, n. 1.

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 71-76 for the quotation and discussion of his evidence.

But a new problem has arisen which puts the question of authorship and that of date in a fresh light. With negligible exceptions the unity of the Apocalypse had been unquestioned. But in the eighties of the last century this became the theme of a very lively discussion. Numerous theories were elaborated, in which the Book was analysed into its alleged sources. Obviously if the Book was not a unity the problem of the authorship had to be restated. We might have to do with a mere compiler whose work was practically limited to the combination of earlier documents. We could in that case hardly speak of an author at all. Or if his method was more masterful and his individual contribution much larger, while the term "author" might be appropriate, full allowance would have to be made for his inclusion of much which was not his own. In particular the acceptance of an analytic theory put the problem of John's relation to the Book in a fresh light. For, assuming that tradition rightly assigned him a share in it, he might either be the author of the work as it stands or the author of one of the sources incorporated in it. And the controversy on the date was alleviated by the theory. For undeniably there were elements in the Book which seemed to point to a date earlier than the destruction of Jerusalem. On the other hand there was not only the very weighty testimony of Irenæus to a date in the nineties, but there were phenomena in the Book itself which strongly rein-

forced this external evidence. If, however, it was not a unity it became easier to do justice to the contradictory data. Earlier and later elements were present in the Book.

But sources need not be limited to written documents, or the phenomena which led critics to postulate such documents be explained in this and no other way. In a study which marked an epoch in the criticism and interpretation of the Book,<sup>1</sup> Gunkel argued that behind it lay an ancient apocalyptic tradition which through its development came to exhibit those features that had suggested the theory of sources.

But the seer claims to have seen his visions in ecstasy and to have received from above his knowledge of the things which were shortly to come to pass. The question then arises whether such a claim is compatible with the view that he incorporated earlier sources or that he drew on an apocalyptic tradition. Are we to suppose that this is simply a literary fiction, part of the apocalyptic machinery? or are we to accept in the fullest extent the representation that the panorama of the Book unrolled itself before the seer's inward eye exactly as he describes it? Or may we, while recognizing that he was not independent of sources, both written and oral, still heartily accept his own assurance that he saw his visions in a prophetic ecstasy?

<sup>1</sup> *Schöpfung und Chaos* (1895).



But while questions of authorship and date, of the unity of the Book and its antecedents are of great importance, our main concern is to interpret the Apocalypse as we have it. And in this case it is not, as with so much of Biblical literature, mainly the problem of interpreting details, though this, it is true, presents difficulties enough. What is at issue is just our understanding of the Book as a whole, the question which, if any, of the main lines of interpretation we should adopt. It has been usual to distinguish three types of interpretation which go by the uncouth names of Præterist, Continuous-historical, and Futurist. According to the first of these the author is concerned almost exclusively with the conditions of his own time and the immediate future. Advocates of the second method hold that the author presents to us the course of events from his own time to the end. The futurists, as the name indicates, believe that it is with the last things alone that the seer is concerned, his visions relate to things which belong to the end of time. All of these interpreters assume that there is a chronology in the Book, though they differ widely as to its interpretation. But some expositors reject all these methods. They believe that the Book is designed to exhibit the operation of great principles in history and the clash of great spiritual forces. No individual events are intended, nor have the chronological statements any reference to time. For example



when the prophet tells us that Satan will be bound for a thousand years, not only are we to reject any literal explanation of the number, we are to recognize that it has nothing to do with time at all. It will be obvious that the interpretation of the Book, alike as a whole and in detail, will be profoundly modified according as we follow one or other of these methods. But the same method may in each case, and notably in the second, lead to widely divergent results.

In particular there is a subsidiary but very important problem of interpretation which must here be mentioned. In what relation do the three series of seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls stand to each other? It has been held by many scholars that each of them travels over the same ground, only from a different point of view. The seven trumpets are essentially a repetition of the seven seals, the seven bowls a repetition of both. Others hold that the seven trumpets are all contained within the seventh seal and are developed out of it, and similarly that the seven bowls are contained within the seventh trumpet. Of course if we held that the author drew on written sources or apocalyptic tradition our attitude to this question would be modified.

Another question of great importance for the interpretation is the view we take as to the degree in which symbolism is present in the Book. Special allowance must be made here for temperament,

and interpreters will probably always differ considerably both in principle and detailed application. Some will lean perhaps to an undue literalism, others to an unregulated mysticism. It is all the more necessary to control excess or defect by objective criteria.

Finally among the larger questions we may mention that of canonicity. Ought the Book to be in the New Testament at all? Its right to canonical rank was contested in the early Church and the issue has since been raised again and again. It has not been unknown for expositors to argue that only on the theory of its interpretation which they themselves adopt can a claim for its inclusion in Scripture be justified. But the answer to this question depends not only on our conclusion as to the meaning of the Book but on our conception of what Scripture is and what are the true criteria of canonicity.

These then are the chief problems raised by the Book as a whole and numerous questions also arise in the detailed interpretation. But before we pass on to their discussion it may be of service if I indicate at once the general results of the investigation, and the standpoint from which the vision is expounded.

In its present form the Apocalypse of John dates from the reign of Domitian, having been issued possibly about the year A.D. 93. In a sense we may speak of it as a unity; in other words, it is the work of an author and not of a mere compiler,

Yet it incorporates a good deal of earlier matter, some of it not later than the destruction of Jerusalem, and some of it non-Christian in its character. It reflects different historical situations and various points of view. But the Book in its present form, and the earlier sections which have been embodied in it, were strictly relevant to the time when they originated and were called forth by the urgent necessities of the readers. In its final form the Book is designed to steady the Churches against the terrible persecution which the fanaticism of the authorities set in motion against those who refused to worship the Roman Emperor. It is a typical apocalypse in this, that its background is a time of terrible trouble, and that it dazzles its readers with brilliant hopes that the trouble, though sharp and bitter, will soon be at an end. In our interpretation of the Book we must bear in mind its apocalyptic character, and read it in the light of the cognate literature both canonical and uncanonical. While it contains unquestionable allusions to contemporary history, and is occasioned by the historical situation from which it springs, we must allow for the employment of earlier sources and for the use of very ancient apocalyptic tradition, to which, rather than to contemporary conditions, many details must be referred.

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## CHAPTER II.

### The Contents of the Apocalypse.

**I**T may be convenient for the reader to have before him an outline of the contents of the Book. Its general structure is not difficult to grasp. But the development is at various points interrupted, and the reason for the arrangement in detail is sometimes far from clear. In the opening chapter the seer, on the isle of Patmos, is in an ecstasy on the Lord's day. Jesus appears to him in His heavenly majesty and gives him a commission to write down his visions in a book and send it to the Seven Churches of Asia. In the second and third chapters follow letters of praise and blame, of warning and encouragement, of threat and promise to the Seven Churches. In the fourth chapter the trumpet voice of Jesus speaks to him again. The ecstasy is renewed, he sees in heaven the throne whereon the Almighty sits, supported by the four living creatures and surrounded by four and twenty thrones on which the crowned elders, robed in white, are sitting. He hears the four living creatures uttering their unceasing chant in

praise of the Eternal and Almighty God, confessing His perfect holiness. He sees the four and twenty elders prostrate themselves before the throne and casting down their crowns, while they utter their praise of God as Creator. In the following chapter he beholds the book on the hand of God, and hears the angel utter the challenge to whoever can take it and break its seven seals. Weeping that no one is found to do this, the seer is comforted by the assurance that the Lion of the tribe of Judah has proved himself worthy. He sees a Lamb in the midst of the throne standing as it had been slain, who takes the book. Then the living creatures and the elders sing a new song, the song of redemption through the blood of the Lamb, a song caught up by the innumerable host of angels and by every creature throughout the universe.

With the sixth chapter the proper action of the Apocalypse begins. There are seven seals on the book. These fall into two divisions. At the opening of each of the first four seals a rider appears on a horse of a particular colour and entrusted with a special mission. At the opening of the fifth seal the souls of the martyrs are seen under the altar and their cry for vengeance is answered. They are to wait till the tale of martyrs is complete. The breaking of the sixth seal ushers in an earthquake of appalling violence which strikes terror into men's hearts, convincing them that the end has come. When we are expecting the seventh

seal to be broken, we have the first of the episodes which form one of the perplexing characteristics of the Revelation. The angels who hold the four winds are bidden to restrain them till the servants of God are sealed. There follows the sealing of the hundred and forty-four thousand from every tribe of Israel. Then the seer beholds an innumerable multitude, drawn from all nations, before the throne. These, he is told, are those who have come out of the great tribulation, their robes washed white, and henceforth they are dedicated to service in God's temple, and, all their sorrows ended, their tears wiped away, are led by the Lamb to drink of the waters of life.

Then the seventh seal is opened and there is silence for half an hour in heaven. Seven angels receive seven trumpets, while another angel adds incense to the prayers of the saints. We now have the second series of plagues, the seven trumpets. These also fall into two groups, the last three being distinguished as three Woes from the first four. The fifth and sixth trumpets in particular are characterised by the exceptional elaborateness of the description.

Just as before the opening of the seventh seal an interlude is inserted, so also there is an interlude before the sounding of the seventh trumpet. A strong angel descends from heaven with a little book. Standing on sea and land he cries with a great voice. At his cry the seven thunders utter



their voice. The seer is about to write down what they uttered but is forbidden. The angel then declares that with the sounding of the seventh trumpet the mystery of God is to be finished. The seer is next bidden to take the little book from the angel and eat it. It makes mingled impressions upon him and he is told that he has still to prophesy over many nations and kings. In the following chapter we have first the measuring of the Temple, apart from its outer court, and then a prediction as to the career of two witnesses. The seventh trumpet is blown and there follows a song of praise that the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and His Messiah. The Temple in heaven is then opened and within it the Ark of the Covenant is seen, and there follow storm and earthquake.

The action, however, does not proceed to its climax. We have another interlude, which extends over several chapters and contains some of the most difficult sections in the Book. We have first the vision of the heavenly woman, with the dragon waiting to devour her child when born. This child is the Messiah and He is saved from the dragon by being caught up to the throne of God, while His mother escapes to the wilderness. On this there follows an account of the war in heaven between Michael and the dragon, ending in the overthrow of the dragon who is cast down to the earth, against which he rages furiously knowing

that his time is short. We then return to the story of the woman who is persecuted by the dragon. She flies on eagle's wings to the wilderness, her adversary casts a river of water out of his mouth to sweep her away. The earth, however, befriends the woman and she effects her escape. The dragon then persecutes the rest of her seed.

Standing on the shore the seer beholds a Beast arise from the sea. This Beast has seven heads and ten horns. One of its heads was wounded to death but recovered. From the dragon the Beast received his power. He blasphemed God, made war with His saints, had universal dominion, and was worshipped by all whose name was not written in the Book of Life. A second beast comes up from the earth and he promotes the worship of the Beast and causes divine honours to be paid to his image on penalty of death. None are permitted to buy and sell save those who are branded with the mark of the Beast or the number of his name, and that number is six hundred and sixty-six.

The seer then beholds a hundred and forty-four thousand who stand with the Lamb on Mount Zion, with His name and the name of God written on their foreheads. These sing the new song, they are celibates who constantly accompany the Lamb. Then three angels fly in mid-heaven, one with an eternal Gospel announcing that the hour of judgment has come, the second proclaiming the fall of Babylon, the third threatening with torment all the

worshippers of the Beast. A voice from heaven now proclaims the blessedness of those who from that time on die in the Lord. Then one like a son of man reaps the harvest of the earth, while another angel gathers its vintage and casts it into the wine-press of God's wrath.

We now come to the seven last plagues, the seven bowls. But first the seer beholds those who have overcome in the warfare with the Beast, standing by the glassy sea and singing the song of Moses and the Lamb. Then the Temple is once more opened and the seven angels with the seven plagues come forth. In this case there is no pause between the sixth and seventh of the series as in the case of the seals and the trumpets, nor do the bowls fall into two groups. There is a close parallelism between the trumpets and the bowls.

The seventeenth chapter contains the vision of the scarlet woman seated on the scarlet Beast. This woman is the Great Babylon, holding a goblet of uncleanness in her hand with which she had intoxicated the inhabitants of the world, while she herself was drunken with the blood of the saints. The angel who showed the seer the vision explains that the Beast was and is not. He is about to come up from the abyss and he will go into perdition. The seven heads of the Beast are seven mountains, they are also seven kings, of whom five are fallen, one is, the other has still to come but will have only a brief reign. The Beast that was and is not

is to be an eighth king, but he is identical with one of the seven. The ten horns of the Beast are ten kings which have still to receive their kingdom. They are in alliance with the Beast but are to be overcome by the Lamb. They will make war on the woman and burn her with fire. This woman is the imperial city, the world's metropolis.

The following chapter opens with the descent of an angel from heaven, who utters the cry that Babylon has fallen and is made desolate. Then a heavenly voice pronounces the dirge over her, describing the lamentation of the kings of the earth who have wantoned with her, and the merchants and seamen who have grown rich by their trade with her. A great angel flings a huge stone into the sea, pronouncing on the gay and wealthy city of enchantments a similar doom. This is followed by the praises of the heavenly multitude for the judgment of Babylon, and the announcement of the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Once more the seer sees heaven opened and the Messiah, King of Kings and Lord of Lords on a white horse. He leads the armies of heaven. An angel summons the birds to feast on the enemies He is to slay. The Beast with the kings and their armies fight with the Messiah; the Beast and the false prophet are captured and cast alive into the lake of fire. The armies are slain with the sword of the Messiah. Then an angel seizes the dragon, binds him and casts him into the abyss for a thousand

years. The martyrs live and reign with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead do not share in this first resurrection. At the end of the thousand years it is necessary for Satan to be released for a brief period. He will gather the innumerable hosts of the nations to battle and they will be destroyed with fire from heaven, while the dragon will join his servants, the Beast and the false prophet, to be tormented with them in the lake of fire and brimstone.

Then a great white throne is set, the books are opened and the dead are judged according to their works. Death and Hades, with all whose names are not in the Book of Life, are cast into the lake of fire, which is the second death.

The old heaven and earth pass away and a new heaven and a new earth take their place. The New Jerusalem comes down from heaven and of its splendours a gorgeous description is given. The seer is forbidden to seal up his prophecy for the time is at hand. For its coming the Spirit and the bride pray. With a warning against any addition to the Book or omission from it, with the promise of Christ's speedy return and the seer's fervent prayer for its fulfilment, the Apocalypse comes to a close.

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## CHAPTER III.

### The Unity of the Book.

THE critical problems presented by the Apocalypse are complex and difficult. We have to inquire into the date of the Book, its authorship and its unity. These problems are closely connected and at some points they are affected by difficulties of interpretation. But it will obviously be best to go as far as we can with the treatment of each of them, without reference to results reached in the discussion of the others. The best order of treatment is not easy to determine. But although it has been raised so recently, it may be most profitable to take up first the question of unity.

It is not necessary to sketch in detail the various hypotheses which have been put forward by those who deny the unity of the Book.<sup>1</sup> Some of these

<sup>1</sup> Convenient summaries and discussions may be found in Briggs, *The Messiah of the Apostles*; E. C. Moore, JBL vol. x. G. A. Barton, AJTh. vol. ii.; Holtzmann, *Jahrbücher für protestantische Theologie*, 1891; and more elaborately Hirscht, *Die Apokalypse und ihre neueste Kritik* (1895), the writer was able to notice Gunkel's SC in his preface; and for the more recent developments Bousset,<sup>2</sup> Moffatt INT<sup>3</sup>, and Charles *Studies in the Apocalypse*.



theories have made what I must feel to be permanent contributions to the interpretation of the Book and our knowledge of its history. On others we can only pronounce the verdict that to-day they are, but to-morrow are cast into the oven. It is somewhat curious that, with slight exceptions,<sup>1</sup> the unity of the Book was, till quite recently, taken for granted by all critics and interpreters. Literary analysis had been applied to the Old Testament on a large scale, and in the New Testament to the Synoptic Gospels in particular. And, what is still more relevant, it found a field for exercise in the apocalyptic literature, the class to which it had long been recognized that our Book belonged. Weizsäcker had early in the eighties called attention to the incorporation of earlier elements,<sup>2</sup> and had

<sup>1</sup> On the earlier exceptions see pp. 378-380.

<sup>2</sup> In his review of Bonwetsch's *Die Geschichte des Montanismus* in TLZ vol. vii. (1882) cols. 78f. He says, "And so far as the Apocalypse is concerned, it is just the question whether we have to regard it as a quite simple document; though it is almost an offence against an axiom of present-day criticism, I must nevertheless plead guilty to the opinion which I have long advocated, that in this writing, which is as assuredly pseudonymous as all apocalypses, we possess a composition, which in its origin is a compilation."

Weizsäcker subsequently stated his own theory in *Das apostolische Zeitalter* (Eng. trans. *The Apostolic Age*). It is perhaps no exaggeration to say that this masterly discussion, which, by a curious coincidence, appeared in the same year as Vischer's essay (1886), laid down the lines to which criticism has more and more tended to return. I might also call attention to his review of Weyland, Rovers, and Spitta (TLZ 1890, cols. 465-471). Students may be interested to know that Völter published an article (in German) entitled *Neueres über die*

given an impulse to his pupil Völter, who began his eccentric critical career in 1882 with a work on the Origin of the Apocalypse.<sup>1</sup> A much greater sensation was created by the publication in 1886 of Vischer's thesis<sup>2</sup> that the main part of the Apocalypse was a Jewish writing somewhat slightly worked over by a Christian hand.<sup>3</sup> No doubt it

*Apokalypse* in the *Theologisch Tijdschrift* for November, 1886, in which he discussed Weizsäcker's treatment of the Revelation in his *Apostolic Age*.

<sup>1</sup> *Die Entstehung der Apokalypse*. It is interesting, in view of later developments, to recall Harnack's review in TLZ, 1882, cols. 561f. He judged very severely of the author's theories, but recognized that some of his observations were important. He mentions the double introduction and close of the Book, the different uses of the idea "the testimony of Jesus Christ," certain formal discrepancies in the situation at various points of the Book. He regards the Christological differences as noteworthy, but says that Völter exaggerates and forgets that similar differences are to be found in works, which are undoubtedly a unity, e.g., The Second Epistle of Clement. In later editions Völter greatly modified his views from time to time.

In his admirable article in EBr<sup>9</sup>, vol. xx, Harnack emphatically affirms the essential unity of the Book. He says, however, "But it is probable enough that the work has been interpolated and touched up in various places (certainly in i. 1-3); and several verses of the epilogue (xxii. 6-21) are not by the author of the book, as indeed the language itself is sufficient to prove. Unless we are utterly deceived the book underwent systematic if not very radical revisions even before the middle of the second century."

I may add that Harnack's article still forms an excellent introduction to the subject, which the student might well assimilate before passing on to the later developments of the problem.

<sup>2</sup> *Die Offenbarung Johannis eine jüdische Apokalypse in christlicher Bearbeitung mit einem Nachwort von Adolf Harnack*.

<sup>3</sup> Rev. i.-iii. and xxii. 6-21 were regarded by Vischer as the work of the Christian redactor. The chief sections in the

was Harnack's sponsorship which secured for it such wide attention and helped at least to gain the measure of acceptance it attained. The author was a theological student, one of Harnack's pupils; and his teacher confesses that when the suggestion was first put before him it met with a rather unpleasant reception. He had himself just written a sketch in which he had traced the history of the interpretation of the Book, but such a theory as that now propounded to him he had never encountered. Was it likely, he said to himself, that it should be left for a mere beginner in New Testament study to discover the right key to the Book when it had eluded the prolonged researches of experts throughout the centuries? But when the pupil modestly indicated his first arguments, he was taken aback and requested his young friend to return in a few days for a closer discussion of his theory. He himself began a careful study of the Book from the new standpoint and he could only describe the result in the words "There fell from my eyes as it were scales."<sup>1</sup>

Jewish apocalypse iv. 1—xxii. 5 assigned to the redactor are v. 9-14, vii. 9-17, xiv. 1-5. Other additions are chiefly in chs. xiii., xiv., xx., xxi. References to the Lamb and other characteristically Christian features are struck out. The exact analysis may be readily ascertained from the Appendix in which Vischer prints the Greek text of Rev. iv. 1—xxii. 5, indicating by heavy type the Christian insertions, and then prints the Christian portions in the whole Book.

<sup>1</sup> In spite of the later discussions, Harnack has maintained his adhesion to Vischer's theory. In his "Nachwort" to Vischer's

Independently of Vischer, a Dutch theologian, Weyland published an investigation<sup>1</sup> in the same year, arguing that a Christian redactor had employed

book he touches on the question whether the Jewish Apocalypse (the "Grundschrift") may itself be composite, but says, "I too have found no reason to doubt the unity of the Grundschrift" (p. 134). On this aspect of the question he speaks more tentatively later. I quote in full the passage in his *Chronologie* in which the expression of his opinion is contained, although part of it is more relevant to the question of authorship: "I plead guilty to the critical heresy, which attributes the Apocalypse and the Gospel to a single author, assuming, of course, that the Apocalypse has been produced by the working over by a Christian of a Jewish apocalypse (or it may be of several Jewish apocalypses for all I care—that is a matter which seems to me no longer capable of being unravelled). I mark off the Christian sections pretty much as Vischer does, and see in them the same spirit and the same hand to which we owe the Gospel. In these sections there is no feature, which points to a personal relation of the author to Jesus Christ during His earthly life" (CAL i. 675). Similarly eight years later in the second edition of his *Mission und Ausbreitung* (1905). Speaking of John the Presbyter, he says: "The second and third Epistles of John certainly belong to him, and we may therefore ascribe to him with much probability, the Fourth Gospel and the Epistle of John also—in fact, we may go a step further and claim for him the Apocalypse with its seven letters and its Christian revision of one or more Jewish apocalypses" (MEC i. 81).

Other scholars thought favourably of Vischer's theory. Overbeck (TLZ, 1887, cols. 28-32, including also a review of Weyland), Pfeiderer (*Urchristentum*<sup>1</sup> otherwise in the second edition), Martineau (*Seat of Authority*<sup>2</sup>, pp. 225f.) may be mentioned. The last of these, however, finds two Jewish sources one from the time of the Jewish war A.D. 66-70, the other about eight years later, and two Christian editors, the former in Domitian's time, the latter in Hadrian's, "answerable for the letters to the churches, as well as for the introduction and conclusion of the whole work." In its present form it could hardly have been issued before A.D. 136.

<sup>1</sup> *Compilatie en Omwerkingshypothesen toegepast op de Apocalypse van Johannes.*

two mutually independent Jewish sources. In 1889 a far more thorough and comprehensive work than any of these was published by Spitta.<sup>1</sup> This of course took full account of the contributions which have been mentioned, but Spitta's conviction that the Revelation was not a unity and contained sections of Jewish origin had been reached before the publication of Völter's treatise. When Vischer's work appeared, he thought that it had solved the problem, but changed his opinion when he read the book. His own theory was that the Apocalypse was a Christian work provided by a later Christian redactor with Jewish additions and additions of his own. The redactor employed three sources, a Christian apocalypse by John Mark, which formed the basis, and two Jewish documents which were inserted in it, one from the time of Pompey, the other from the reign of Caligula. Although this solution has not met with acceptance, Spitta's volume was stimulating and instructive in no ordinary measure and greatly advanced the interpretation of the Book.

I need not linger on the development till 1895 when Gunkel's *Creation and Chaos*<sup>2</sup> appeared.

<sup>1</sup> *Die Offenbarung des Johannes.*

<sup>2</sup> *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit.* This was very sympathetically reviewed by Wrede (TLZ, 1896), and had a marked influence on Bousset's *Der Antichrist* and on his commentary, which appeared the following year, and, as stated in the text, on Pfeiderer's *Urchristentum*.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand Wellhausen criticized it very severely in the section of his



This checked the tendency to literary analysis and opened up a new line of investigation. The author sought to establish the existence of a secret apocalyptic tradition of great antiquity and Babylonian origin, and to explain in that way the phenomena which had led the analytic critics to infer the use of documentary sources. Nevertheless eminent scholars recognized that the analytic method was not discredited. The second edition of Pfeiderer's *Urchristentum* (1902), while it clearly showed the influence of Gunkel, yet admitted the use of

*Skizzen und Vorarbeiten*, Heft 6, devoted to apocalyptic literature (pp. 225-234). Gunkel replied in the *Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie* for 1899, pp. 581ff., complaining, not without reason, of Wellhausen's misrepresentation of his real attitude, due to careless and superficial study of his book. Wellhausen's own work on the analysis of Revelation published eight years later takes no account of Gunkel's method. Baldensperger's note in *Die messianisch apokalyptischen Hoffnungen des Judentums* (1903), pp. 196f., does more justice to Gunkel, but he thinks that Wellhausen's position has a relative justification. See also Preuschen's remarks in his article *Paulus als Antichrist*, ZNTW II. pp. 169f. With his *Schöpfung und Chaos* should be taken Gunkel's later essay *Zum religionsgeschichtlichen Verständnis des Neuen Testaments* (1903). He protests in this work (pp. 39f.) as he had previously protested in ZWTh, 1889, pp. 590ff., and in his edition of IV Ezra in Kautzsch's *Die Apokryphen und Pseudepigraphen des Alten Testaments* II. p. 343 (1900) against the misrepresentation (of a statement on p. 233 of his earlier work) that he ruled out all references to contemporary history in apocalyptic, and especially in Revelation; he regarded such explanations as generally incorrect, but accepted some both in Revelation and the apocalyptic literature generally. How far he was from any repugnance to the analysis of books into documentary sources was clear from his commentary on Genesis (1900), to say nothing of its employment in *Schöpfung und Chaos* itself.



sources. A still more notable contribution, on different lines from Spitta's, but owing much to it in the way of stimulus, was the dissertation of J. Weiss published in 1904.<sup>1</sup> This also has not found acceptance, but I cannot mention it, any more than Spitta's investigation, without gratefully confessing my own indebtedness to it. The only other work that need be mentioned in this series is the much slighter but still suggestive discussion by Wellhausen.<sup>2</sup>

From this brief sketch it will be clear that several scholars independently hit upon the idea that the Apocalypse incorporated earlier sources. Another point on which there was considerable agreement was the presence of non-Christian elements in the Book, one or more sources being regarded as Jewish. The proof of composite authorship is to be found primarily in the presence of inconsistencies in statement or point of view of such a character as may not without violence be attributed to the same author. Vocabulary and style may similarly present such marked divergences as to be incompatible with unity of authorship. In the case of a Christian book elements may be included which naturally suggest a non-Christian origin. We may

<sup>1</sup> *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*. With this should be mentioned the author's commentary on Revelation published in *Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments* (1907).

<sup>2</sup> *Analyse der Offenbarung Johannis* (1907). This, like Wellhausen's other New Testament work, has had a special influence on Wendland's *Die urchristlichen Literaturformen* (1912).

not unreasonably infer that these have been borrowed from another source by the author or compiler. And there may be other features which suggest or confirm the impression of composite authorship. Differences in the historical situation reflected have to be taken into account. When we are dealing with an apocalypse we must recognize that the composite authorship, so characteristic of apocalypses as a class, affords some presumption that a particular apocalypse is not unlikely to be composite. And the fact that Jewish apocalypses have undergone Christian revision requires us to inquire without prejudice whether this may be true of the Book of Revelation.

Certain cautions must of course be borne in mind. It is notorious that writers do contradict themselves and that the same mind can harbour logical inconsistencies. The evidence of style and vocabulary may also be fallacious if incautiously applied. In particular, if the composition of a book extends over a period of several years, ideas and style may undergo considerable change. The same remark applies to the historical situation, especially in a period so exceptionally momentous as that within which our Book was composed. The presence of Jewish elements in an apocalypse does not in itself imply non-Christian origin.<sup>1</sup> For the Church took

<sup>1</sup> This point is rather important in view of the tendency to claim for a Jewish source whatever is not specifically Christian. Thus Harnack says that the canon followed by Vischer has

over its eschatology to a large extent from the contemporary Judaism. It is only the features in which there is a real differentiation between the two religions, that can be used to demonstrate a Jewish origin. Moreover we have to bear in mind that non-Christian material may have been derived from current dogma or eschatological tradition rather than from a literary source, and incorporated by a Christian author who was not conscious of its real significance or ultimate origin. It is probable that in many instances apocalyptists used material which they did not themselves understand, but which had to be included since it came down to them as part of the inherited tradition.

With these cautions in mind we may take up the question as it affects our Book. So far as vocabulary and style are concerned, this criterion may be left out of account, for the composition exhibits a striking uniformity in this respect, so much so that Vischer can account for it, in a Book originating as his theory represents, only on the supposition that it was written originally in Hebrew or Aramaic, the uniformity of style being due to the translator (pp. 37f.).<sup>1</sup> Leaving this aside,

proved true that whatever does not bear its Christian origin on its face must be treated as Jewish. (Vischer, p. 134.)

<sup>1</sup> Presumably Canon Charles will publish in his forthcoming commentary the detailed results of his examination of the diction. Meanwhile his conclusion may be stated: "Now I have been applying the same rigorous examination to every verse, and every clause, and every phrase in the Apocalypse,

however, a weighty argument may be derived from the presence of apparently non-Christian sections. The first example that I will take of this is the opening of the eleventh chapter. Here the seer is bidden measure with a reed "the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein." But he is instructed to leave unmeasured "the court which is without the temple" because it has been given to the Gentiles who will tread the Holy City under foot for forty-two months. The most probable interpretation of this passage is that the Temple with its altar and worshippers is to be spared, while the outer court and the Holy City are to be abandoned to the Gentiles. The situation presupposed is apparently that which existed when the Roman army under Titus was threatening the capture of Jerusalem. If the Book belongs to the nineties there would be a certain presumption that this passage, written more than twenty years earlier, was taken from an older source. Such a conclusion would not of course be necessary, for the author might have incorporated an older prediction of his own. That however, is not probable in itself, since we should have expected

and the result of this examination furnishes irrefragable proof that the main bulk of the book is from the hand of one and the same author. This does, however, not exclude the possibility that here and there he has used sources, Hebrew and Greek: that he has translated the former, and in a few cases has taken over the latter as they stand: or that he has adapted to fresh contexts earlier visions of his own, which in their original contexts had a somewhat different meaning" (*Studies*, pp. 108f.).

him to discard a prediction which had not been fulfilled. But what seems decisive evidence that the passage is not by the author is that it was apparently written by a Jew, not by a Christian. For can we suppose that any Christian would have predicted that the Temple would be spared, when it was notorious that Jesus Himself had predicted that not one stone of it should be left upon another ?<sup>1</sup>

It may, however, be retorted that we are by no means shut up to this conclusion. For the passage might be interpreted in such a way as not to involve the contradiction of our Lord's words. And in any case it will be urged that if a Christian author could include the passage in his Book he could equally well have written it. The former of these points I must leave without discussion, merely affirming my own conviction that the interpretation I have given is correct. The second objection, however, raises a question of some importance for other passages as well and it is desirable therefore to deal with it at once. The original author is in a different position from the man who borrows a passage for inclusion in his Book. The former is

<sup>1</sup> Some scholars escape this conclusion by a different interpretation of the passage (see pp. 71, 291f.). Spitta thinks that the passage originally referred to the capture of Jerusalem by Pompey (pp. 422f.). Bousset and Pfeiderer take the view that the reference is to the anticipated capture by Titus ; but they feel no confidence in the argument that a Christian could not have predicted the preservation of the Temple, even though Jesus had predicted its total destruction.



to be taken as intending to convey the sense which his words naturally suggest ; and my contention is that a Christian, aware that Jesus had predicted the destruction of the Temple, would never have written an oracle which seemed directly to deny it. But if a Christian had some reason for regarding the prediction as inspired and desired for some purpose to include it, he would not be deterred by the apparent contradiction, since he would assume that the words had a significance other than that which lay on the surface. The interpreter therefore may have to reckon here, as in some other passages, with the possibility of two interpretations for one passage. He has to enquire what the passage meant for the author of the Book as it stands, but he may also have to enquire what meaning it bore for the original writer. In some instances it may still be felt that the reason for the insertion of a passage, apparently so uncongenial to a Christian, is not easy to divine. But to this difficulty, which is not unreal, it may be replied that it is much easier to understand if it was taken over as part of a larger whole. We are scarcely to assume that the author found this little oracle of two verses circulating by itself.<sup>1</sup> It would not in that case

<sup>1</sup> For Wellhausen's view see p. 292. Gunkel is sarcastic on the preservation of the prophecy, and his comment on the interpretation is worth quoting as an illustration of his attitude to what he subsequently calls "contemporary-historical soap-bubbles." He says : " Only in that time and circle then should the belief have been entertained that in the last time the Holy



be so easy to comprehend its appropriation. But the difficulty is greatly lightened if we suppose that it formed part of a series of prophecies woven into a connected whole. If this complex attracted the seer as such, he would much more readily take it as it stood, without too anxious a scrutiny of its parts, than if these existed independently and were adopted one by one.

We have in the twelfth chapter the section of the Book which raises the question of non-Christian origin in its acutest form. It is the strange story of the heavenly woman, the dragon and the man-child, and of the war in heaven between Michael and the dragon. This chapter plays so important a part in the criticism and interpretation that it must necessarily be prominent in any discussion of the Book. It will therefore be simplest not to limit ourselves at this point to its bearing on the question of documentary analysis but to trace the story itself back to its origin.

The seer beholds a woman clothed with the sun, crowned with twelve stars, with the moon beneath

Land would be overwhelmed but the Temple itself would be spared ! And what a piece of good fortune that the scrap of paper, on which the two verses stood, was saved for us from the burning of Jerusalem ! He who hears such contemporary-historical explanations for the first time may perhaps be dazzled by them ; but he who knows the large number of such contemporary-historical explanations, which have been put forward in the last twenty years, many of them just as 'ingenious' as this of Wellhausen's, loses his taste for them, and wants to recognize those only, which the text itself clearly offers." (ZWTh, 1889, p. 600.)

her feet. She is on the point of giving birth to a child. A great red dragon is also seen in heaven with seven heads, crowned with diadems, and ten horns. His tail sweeps a third part of the stars to the earth.<sup>1</sup> He himself stands before the woman waiting to devour the child. The child is born, He who is destined to be the Messiah.<sup>2</sup> He is delivered from the dragon and caught up into safety at the throne of God. The dragon and his angels fight with Michael and his angels and are defeated and cast down upon the earth. He assails the woman, who escapes on eagle's wings to the wilderness. He pours forth a stream of water to carry her away, but the earth swallows it and she reaches in safety her appointed retreat in the wilderness. The dragon, thus foiled a second time, wreaks his vengeance on the other children of the woman.

No objection to a Christian origin of the description of the war in heaven need be raised. But in spite

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps originally an ætiological myth to account for the comparative fewness of the stars in a certain part of heaven. The stars are heavenly powers, therefore not the dragon's followers as some think. Milton adopts this interpretation:—

“ His count'nance, as the Morning Star that guides  
The starrie flock, allur'd them, and with lyes  
Drew after him the third part of Heaven's Host.”

(*Paradise Lost* : Book V.)

But Milton regarded the dragon as originally a heavenly being.

<sup>2</sup> The identification with the Messiah is clear from the clause “ a man child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron ” (v. 5), in spite of the fact that this is applied to the victor in ii. 27. This is confirmed by xix. 15.

of the denial of eminent scholars, the impossibility that any Christian could have originated this representation of the career of the Messiah will, we may confidently assume, be more and more widely recognized. The impression which it makes on the reader is that immediately after His birth the Messiah is snatched up to the throne of God, and there, till He gains the strength for His task, is shielded from the dragon's attack. It is surely incredible that any Christian, for whom the identification with Jesus was the fixed point of departure, should have created so false an impression and have ignored not simply His life and ministry but His death and resurrection. He could never have implied that the Messiah had not been exposed to the assaults of the devil, when he knew that the Passion history was the climax of the Gospel story. We are therefore compelled to postulate a pre-Christian origin for the story. And since the story depicts the career of the Messiah we naturally turn to Judaism, for Judaism also had a Messianic doctrine. It is clear that the objections which may be urged against a Jewish origin are much less serious than those to which the theory of Christian origin is exposed. A Christian writer was fettered by the Christian facts. He was not free to play fast and loose with history, to construct the career of the Messiah out of his imagination and make the Ascension the immediate sequel of the Birth. But a Jewish writer had much more fluid material to

deal with and was not compelled to run it into such definite moulds. He could give free rein to his speculation and therefore he could, without any disloyalty to his fundamental convictions, represent the child as born of a heavenly mother, and as caught up to the throne of God immediately after His birth to escape the dragon's hostility. At the same time the theory of Jewish origin is beset with difficulties. No evidence is forthcoming that a Messianic forecast conceived on these lines ever existed in Judaism. For the parallel mentioned by Vischer from *Berachoth* has only one point in common with our story, namely, that the child was carried away.<sup>1</sup> Still the absence of such a parallel is in no way decisive against Jewish origin, and it is in fact not improbable that our author derived it from a Jewish source.

<sup>1</sup> This curious passage is quoted at length by Lightfoot in his *Horæ Hebraicæ*, note on Matt. ii. 1 (*Whole Works*, 1833, pp. 34f.) and by J. Drummond in *The Jewish Messiah*, pp. 279f., who has made Lightfoot's "translation in many points more literal." A brief account is given by Schürer, *Geschichte des Jüdischen Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu Christi*<sup>3</sup> II. p. 532 (Eng. trans. II. ii. 164), and Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* i. 175. The gist of the passage is that a Jew learns from an Arabian that the Temple is laid waste and the Messiah born in Bethlehem. The Jew travels to Bethlehem, sees the mother, and returns some days later. He enquires after the child and she replies, "After the time you saw me last, winds and tempests came and snatched him away from me" (so Drummond; for "winds" Lightfoot gives "spirits" and for "from me" he has "out of my hands"). E. A. Abbott, I do not know on what grounds, speaks of the passage as "perhaps shewing traces of Christian influence" (p. 96).

Nevertheless the theory of a purely Jewish origin is inadequate. The representation of the woman herself as in heaven clad with the sun, crowned with stars, while her feet rested on the moon, suggests a mythical origin. So too does the figure of the dragon and the statement that his tail cast a third of the stars of heaven to the earth. The concluding episode of the dragon's attempt to overwhelm the woman with the flood he poured from his mouth, and the action of the earth in opening its mouth to absorb the water, is hardly more at home in a Jewish than in a Christian writing. We have accordingly to assume a mythological origin for the story. This was pointed out by Dieterich, who compared the story of Leto and the Python and the birth of Apollo.<sup>1</sup> To this Gunkel objected

<sup>1</sup> *Abraxas* pp. 117ff., *Nekyia* p. 217. The Python learns from a prophecy that the son of Leto will slay him. Leto is with child by Zeus, and Hera jealously brings it about that the birth may take place only where the sun does not shine. The Python pursues Leto, who is conveyed by Boreas to Poseidon. He shelters her on Delos, raised from the sea by his trident, but a floating island until Zeus chained it to the bottom of the sea, that there the birth of Leto's children might take place. Having brought her to Delos, Poseidon covered it with the waves, and thus baffled the Python who, not finding her, returned to Parnassus. Then he raised the island and Phœbus Apollo and Artemis were born. On the fourth day Apollo went to Parnassus and killed the Python. The story is familiar to all in Byron's allusion "Where Delos rose and Phœbus sprung." It was famous in the region where the Apocalypticist lived, and the flight of Leto was represented on coins. E. A. Abbott thinks it "more reasonable to contend that Pagan combined with Christian thought to shape this story" than to argue for Jewish origin. "Looking due West from his convict



that a monotheist would hardly take over a piece of mythology of this kind straight from heathenism.<sup>1</sup> His own suggestion that the original was a story of the birth of Marduk may be correct,<sup>2</sup> though evidence for it has so far not been discovered. But the fact that Bousset has been able to point to a similar Egyptian myth, in which Hathor is substituted for Leto, and Horus for Apollo,<sup>3</sup> suggests that we have here to do with a widespread myth, which was told in substantially the same form in various countries. In its original form this myth apparently ran somewhat as follows. The dragon of chaos and darkness, having been warned that a child is to be born who will slay him, seeks to destroy the mother before the child is born. To secure the child's birth in safety, she flees away and eludes the dragon's pursuit. The child is born and subsequently slays the dragon. He is the radiant sun-god who destroys the power of darkness.<sup>4</sup> If this myth came to the author by

island, John would see Delos daily, a few leagues off. He might naturally hear from his fellow-convicts the story of its preparation for becoming the birthplace of the God of the Sun" (p. 96). It might be observed that in this story the hostile power is an earth-deity, while the god of the sea, Poseidon, plays a friendly part; whereas in the Apocalypse water is used to overwhelm the woman.

<sup>1</sup> SC pp. 283-286.

<sup>2</sup> SC pp. 385-391.

<sup>3</sup> *Off. J.*<sup>2</sup> pp. 354f.

<sup>4</sup> Some think that the story of Herod's attack on the infant Jesus, who is in this instance saved by the flight into Egypt, is another version of the same myth. The question is too large to discuss here; the problem is similar to that presented



way of Judaism it had probably by a process of gradual transformation first become acceptable to Jewish feeling. The dragon was identified with the devil, the sun-god with the Messiah. One important point of difference is very curious. In the heathen myth the flight of the woman is placed before the birth of the child, and this is obviously its proper position. In the Apocalypse the dragon is in the woman's presence before the child is born, and then is balked of his intention to devour it by the child's rapture to the right hand of God. The woman's flight is not suppressed; but it has now lost its main significance, since it does not contribute to the child's safety. The reason for this change may be best considered when we have to discuss the significance of the story for the author. Even in its present form the story is so remote from Christian ideas that we can hardly understand what led the author to adopt it. It would lighten the difficulty if we could suppose that it not only lay before him in written form, but that it formed part of a larger literary whole which he

by Matthew's story of the virgin conception. It is unlikely, in view of the general character of Matthew's Messianic proof-texts, that Hosea xi. 1 suggested the story; just as it is unlikely that the story of the virgin conception was suggested by Isaiah vii. 14. Both stories have been accordingly referred to pagan mythology, but for the Gospels this is improbable. The Apocalypse is quite another matter. (The writer may refer to what he has said in the article "Immanuel" in the *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, and to *Christianity: its Nature and its Truth*, pp. 186-190.)

may have wished to incorporate. He might more readily have taken in a larger connexion what he would have shrunk from adopting for its own sake. It may be added that there is considerable reason for thinking that the chapter is itself composite (see pp. 300-303).

The seventeenth chapter exhibits various marks of composite origin, particularly in the reckoning of the kings and the indictment against the scarlet woman, possibly the account of her fate, and the double interpretation of the seven heads of the Beast. The discussion of these indications must for the present be reserved. Meanwhile it may be pointed out that the author himself suggests in the episode of the angel and the little book (x. 8-11) that at this point he begins to employ a literary source. And this is perhaps corroborated by the allusion to the utterance of the seven thunders which the seer would have written down but for the prohibition addressed to him (x. 3f.). This may be a reference to a seven-thunders vision in literary form which he meditated employing.

## CHAPTER IV.

### The Authorship.

THE problem of authorship is not the least complex of the numerous problems which the Book presents. The earliest tradition attributed it to the Apostle John. Justin Martyr, writing about the middle of the second century, says explicitly, "A certain man whose name was John, one of the apostles of Christ, prophesied in a revelation made to him that the believers in our Christ should spend a thousand years in Jerusalem."<sup>1</sup> This affirmation as to the apostolic authorship is made again and again by other Fathers, including Hippolytus, Tertullian and Origen ; while Irenæus in ascribing both it and the Fourth Gospel to John, a disciple of the Lord, in all probability intended the Apostle John. Nor is there anything of positive weight to be put in the other scale. The rejection of it by the Alogi rested not on a different tradition but on antipathy to the contents ; nor can we dignify by the name of criticism the fantastic guess that the books were the work of Cerinthus. Nor can any more weight be allowed to the similar attitude

<sup>1</sup> Dialogue with Trypho, 81.

of Caius of Rome early in the third century. The discussion of the authorship by Dionysius of Alexandria, towards the middle of the third century, is intrinsically much more valuable ; but his doubts as to the apostolic authorship are based on internal evidence and have no tradition behind them.

The external evidence for the apostolic authorship is undeniably weighty. Justin's evidence is incidental and therefore more important ; it is, for a New Testament book, quite early ; and he had been in Ephesus and was thus in a favourable position for knowing the view held in Asia where the Book had been put into circulation. The absence of divergent tradition, as distinct from opinion, is also notable. In spite of this the apostolic authorship is rejected by the majority of scholars, partly on grounds derived from an examination of the Book itself, partly on larger considerations. Thrice in the first chapter and once in the last the writer is described as John. In three of the four instances it is his self-designation. Now it is true that apocalypses are as a rule pseudonymous, in other words the author veils his identity under an assumed name, usually that of a well-known character of the patriarchal age or Hebrew history. It is the view of several critics that in this respect the Revelation follows apocalyptic precedent. It must be remembered, however, that the reason which led to the practice in Judaism did not hold good for a Christian apocalypticist. The Law had

superseded prophecy in Judaism; hence he who desired to prophesy spoke in the name of another, choosing as the alleged author some venerated worthy. But the Gospel had passed beyond Judaism and had transcended the Law and the prophets. It was in possession of a new revelation, given by God through no merely human spokesman but by His Son. The prophets in the Christian assemblies were themselves moved to utterance by the same Holy Spirit who had spoken through the prophets of the Old Covenant. There was accordingly no need for disguise.

A more plausible reason for the employment of a fictitious name would be the peril which use of the real name might have involved. A charge of treason might easily be based on some utterances in the Book.<sup>1</sup> Yet the name John was so common that a writer who bore it could use it without fear that he was giving the authorities a dangerous clue to his identification.

In other cases where a pseudonym is employed, it is the name of an outstanding personality whose authority the real author intends to claim for his work. Presumably then if our Book is pseudonymous the author means by John a person of recognized authority and influence in the Church

<sup>1</sup> Selwyn actually argues that John was probably banished by the Asiarch because he had written Rev. iv.—xxii., or the greater part of it, before A.D. 70, and had leisure to re-edit the work and prefix the first three chapters in Patmos (p. 127).

of Asia. If so, it can hardly be any other than the John of Asia who was the teacher of Polycarp, whether the Apostle John or another need not at this point be discussed. But this would involve an extraordinary situation. In all probability when the Apocalypse was published John of Asia was still alive, and the view that some unknown writer issued a work to Churches in which the alleged author was still to be found is simply incredible. Nor is the case much mended if it be assumed that when the Apocalypse was published, John of Asia was dead. Such an assumption would be in the teeth of all the evidence; but in any case his relations with Polycarp involve that his death could not have happened so long before, and the attempt to put the Book into circulation under his name could hardly have been attempted when most of his friends were still alive and knew well whether he had been in Patmos or not, and whether he had claimed there to have seen heaven opened and the future unveiled, and to have received from his Lord who reigned in glory the commission to address the Churches.

And in this connexion another point deserves attention. The pseudonymous apocalypse was ascribed to a man who had for centuries been dead. Hence the question would naturally be raised, Why, if the revelation was received so long ago, has it come to light only in our own time? The question was a reasonable one and an answer was



not wanting. It was alleged that the book had been sealed, in other words, withheld from publication.<sup>1</sup> But our apocalypse presents a notable contrast to this. If other books were sealed till the time was at hand, the injunction to John is "Seal not up the words of the prophecy of this book; for the time is at hand." How, when the Book is dominated by a sense of the impending end and the need for urgency, could delay in publication till the seer was dead have been defended, or what plausible explanation could be offered of his failure to transmit to the seven churches the letters he had been commissioned to send?

The theory of pseudonymity is thus involved in insuperable difficulties. No prejudice in favour of it ought to be based on the presumption that as an apocalypse it may be expected to conform to the convention of its class.<sup>2</sup> For it is just here that its

<sup>1</sup> Thus *Daniel* is a work of the Maccabean period. But it contains revelations, said to have been given in the Babylonian and early Persian periods. But the author anticipates the objection that might be felt on account of their publication centuries later by the words, "But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end" (Dan. xii. 4 cf. 9).

<sup>2</sup> Weizsäcker II. 174-176, defending the view expressed in TLZ vii. cols. 78f.; Wernle, *Beginnings of Christianity* I. p. 363, "Very probably, too, the name of John is intended to denote the celebrated disciple of Jesus, and then the book is pseudonymous, like all similar compositions." Bacon (FG pp. 174-183, MNT pp. 107, 199) takes the main body of the work to be Palestinian, but furnished with commendatory letters, and guaranteed by fictitious assertions that its author was the Apostle John.

differentia from other apocalypses comes into play. It is not written by a Jew and attributed to a Hebrew worthy who lived many centuries earlier, but written by a Christian for the contemporaries of him in whose name it was issued ; written too in an age possessed with the most vivid consciousness that the Spirit of prophecy had been poured out and that it was living in an era of a new and supreme revelation.

But while the case for fictitious authorship completely breaks down, there are also positive objections to it. If the author had intended to pass himself off for someone else he would assuredly have taken pains to bring out the identification unambiguously. John was too common a name to be other than a vague designation, and some touches must have been added to differentiate the John intended from others who bore the same name. Moreover, in the absence of strong reasons to the contrary, the direct statement of the writer is entitled to credit.

The author accordingly was called John. But this opens up several possibilities. He may be a John otherwise known to us or possibly a John of whom no other record is preserved. And it must of course be borne in mind that, if older sources are incorporated in the Book the sections which contain the name John may belong to one of these.

Of the Johns whose names are known to us, three come into consideration :—John the son of

Zebedee, John Mark, and the Presbyter John, assuming that he is to be distinguished from the Apostle.

It might seem unnecessary to discuss the claims of John Mark. It is true that they have found little support;<sup>1</sup> but views on the Johannine problem which have been treated as a negligible paradox at one time have been widely accepted at another, and it need occasion no surprise if a turn of the critical wheel should bring Mark's name into prominence in this connexion. Hitzig argued for Marcan authorship<sup>2</sup> largely on the ground of stylistic resemblances. Hitzig was a much weightier authority on the Old Testament than on the New; but he was undeniably an eminent philologist and an exegete of great insight and acuteness. He was over-subtle and at times perverse; but these qualities and a tendency to extreme and sometimes irresponsible criticism ought not to blind us to his

<sup>1</sup> In the *Prolegomena to the Apocalypse* in his *Annotations on the New Testament* Beza, while not desirous of disputing overmuch about the authorship, prefers to assign it to the Apostle John rather than anyone else. He adds, however, that if any other conclusion could be legitimately drawn from the style, he would certainly assign it to no one more readily than to Mark, owing to the likeness not merely in words but in forms of speech, while the style of the Gospel of Mark is almost identical with that of the Revelation. (Cambridge edition of 1642, p. 744.) Ebrard and Lücke have rejected the theory of Marcan authorship after examination, similarly Bleek and Beyschlag with a brief discussion. Critics generally pass the suggestion over in silence or with bare mention (e.g., Hilgenfeld).

<sup>2</sup> *Über Johannes Marcus und seine Schriften. Oder: Welche Johannes hat die Offenbarung verfasst?* (1843).

great merits. And his discussion of our subject is still worth consulting. He did not succeed, however, in carrying scholars with him, with the exception of Weisse, though Hausrath, without definitely accepting his view, mentions it with some approval (*The Time of the Apostles*, iii. 268). It is interesting that it is to John Mark that Spitta assigns the Christian Apocalypse dating from before A.D. 70, which forms one of the three main sources combined in the book. But whereas Hitzig argued on the ground of resemblances between Revelation and the Second Gospel for Mark's authorship of both, Spitta infers from the differences between his Christian source and the Second Gospel that the latter cannot have been written by John Mark.<sup>1</sup>

Hitzig's view cannot of course be refuted, but there are several objections to it. We have no evidence to connect Mark with the province of Asia. Nor is there any indication that he was a prophet, as the author of Revelation undoubtedly was. It is further improbable that he should have described himself simply as John, though this is not to say that he could not have done so. And tradition gives not the faintest suggestion that he was responsible for any part of the New Testament except the Second Gospel. If the Apocalypse was written by John of Asia we could not reasonably ascribe it to Mark. Obviously we could not if that John was the son of Zebedee. But probably not,

<sup>1</sup> pp. 502-504, 527f.

if he was the Presbyter. For the Presbyter John was apparently the source of the account given by Papias as to the origin of the Second Gospel and the critical tone in which he speaks of it shows sufficiently clearly that he was not its author. We cannot then identify the John of Asia with Mark, though this would not exclude his authorship of Revelation. Such authorship, however, is improbable on the other grounds which have been enumerated.

The case for attributing the Revelation to the Apostle John has far more substance in it. The external evidence is, as we have seen, undeniably strong. Yet many feel it to be inconsistent with the internal evidence. And those who believe that it cannot have been written by the author of the Fourth Gospel necessarily deny its apostolic origin if they attribute the Gospel to the Apostle.

It has often been said that the absence of personal reminiscence in the description of Christ necessitates the conclusion that the Book cannot have been written by one of the twelve apostles. The verdict on authorship may be correct, but hardly upon this ground. It is wholesome for us to remember that neither in the absence of such reminiscence nor in the exalted Christology did the Tübingen School find any difficulty in ascribing the work to the son of Zebedee. And it is surely a question how far we may reasonably expect such reminiscences in a work of this kind. An apocalypse is not to be

judged as we should judge a Gospel. Moreover, not a little depends on the view we take of the visions. If they were purely literary creations we might expect them to exhibit the influence of Christ's earthly life if the author had been a witness of it. And this is particularly the case with the Christophany at the opening of the Book. In the description of the glorified Christ there are, it is true, details of apparently literary origin. In other words they are derived by the author from his reading rather than given in the vision itself. If the scene were translated from a literary into a pictorial form, we should at once realise the difficulty of supposing that the vision occurred exactly as described. Yet it is not a purely imaginative construction nor built up of features drawn from literature. There was a psychical basis, a real experience lies behind it, whether objective or subjective we need not now inquire. John was "in the Spirit," that is to say, he was in an ecstasy. Hence we may allow, as in dreams, for a large margin of the bizarre and the incongruous, and not insist overmuch on the literary elements in the description. It is too much to ask that the relations between the disciple and the manifested Lord should be taken up at the point where they had been dropped. Overwhelming terror is not an uncommon accompaniment of ordinary psychical experiences. People have fainted at what they have taken to be the appearance of their dearest



friend. The apostles were certainly not so absorbed in the thought of the exalted Lord that they never remembered the earthly Jesus ; but the fact of His exaltation, the constant longing for His return in glory, were dominant in their thought of Him. Had the figure been a purely literary creation, we should have expected the marks of the Passion to be mentioned, as in the scene of the book with seven seals. But there is no reference to these. The death is in the author's mind, he had spoken of it shortly before, and Christ Himself refers to it immediately after. And it is to the Passion history that reference is generally made. The mode of death is indicated in v. 11 and we have a reference to those who pierced Him in i. 7.

No importance can be attached to the assertion that the vision of the woman and the man-child proves how far the writer was from having any personal acquaintance with Jesus. What it proves is rather, as is pointed out elsewhere (pp. 33f.), that the section could not have been written by a Christian at all. Nor can it be argued that a Christology so exalted is inconceivable in the case of one of Christ's chosen companions. Could anyone, it may be said, who had lived in familiar intercourse with Jesus have ever described Him in the language of the Apocalypse, which would have been idolatrous if applied even to an angel of the loftiest order? Why should he not, if such description were true to fact? And if it were not

true to fact, yet would the language be incredible? It was notorious that Paul had spoken in the same strain and no protest from the side of the original apostles had been uttered. To compromise their monotheism would have been to them an offence immeasurably greater than to set aside the Law. Yet while Paul's attitude to the Law gave rise to an embittered controversy, his teaching on the Person of Christ seems to have raised no question, at least in responsible quarters. Surely it is not without significance that men of the calibre of the Tübingen critics did not feel that the Christology of the book warranted any hesitation in attributing it to the Apostle John, though it is true that they had a tendency to explain away its full significance (p. 78).

Nor can I regard as of real force the contention that no apostle could have spoken of the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb inscribed on the foundations of the New Jerusalem in so objective a way as in xxi. 14. Assuming that the seer was in an ecstasy, the circumstance that his own name was included in the list ought not to have prevented him from stating the fact exactly as it was disclosed to him. More modestly stated it could not have been.

On the other hand the reference to his presence in Patmos raises difficulties on the assumption that he was there as a convict, and on the further assumption of the Domitianic date. We have, of

course, no definite information as to the time of John's birth. He may have been several years younger than Jesus. If he was ten years His junior he would still be nearly sixty when the fire of Rome took place ; and he would be more than sixty at the earliest date we can reasonably assign to the Apocalypse. There is no insuperable difficulty in supposing that John might have been condemned to hard labour of the severest kind, have survived it and carried on his activity in the Churches of Asia as described in tradition. But it is very difficult to believe that a man between eighty and ninety should have passed through these experiences. The difficulty would be greatly mitigated if we set aside the interpretation of the words " I was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus," which explains them of banishment for the offence of Christianity. Probably, however, this interpretation ought to be maintained, and if so the Apostle's authorship must be pronounced improbable. If the sections of the Book written by John belong to an earlier source which the author has incorporated, the possibility of apostolic authorship for this source would not be excluded by the argument just stated.

If the now widely accepted view is correct that the Apostle John was put to death by Jews, presumably in Palestine, and, if not when his brother James was killed by Herod, at least before the destruction of Jerusalem, then the apostolic

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authorship of the Apocalypse is clearly impossible. The evidence alleged for this revolutionary conclusion is partly an inference from Mark x. 39 that James and John alike suffered martyrdom and thus drank the cup which Jesus drank and were baptized with His baptism, partly a statement attributed to Papias that John the Divine and his brother James were killed by Jews. I cannot view without astonishment the growing popularity of this view or observe without regret how "even Barnabas" is carried away by his less moderate colleagues. It is true that the evidence for the view that Papias made some such statement was strengthened by the publication in 1888 of what is known as "the de Boor fragment."<sup>1</sup> It is possible that if the work of Papias should ever be recovered the alleged statement may be found in it. But we

<sup>1</sup> *Neue Fragmente des Papias, Hegesippus und Pierius in bisher unbekannten Excerpten aus der Kirchengeschichte des Philippus Sidetes* von Dr. C. de Boor (TU Band V. ii. p. 170). De Boor says very confidently that the discovery has put a definite end to the doubts as to the authenticity of the quotation, and that there can be no further doubt that Papias really related that the Apostle John was put to death by Jews (p. 177). And this view is taken by many. Of course Papias may have said this, and yet, as Clemen argues, it may not have been true, but an incorrect inference from Mark x. 39, such as in fact Wellhausen drew, although unaware of the alleged quotation from Papias (*Das Evangelium Marci*<sup>1</sup>, p. 90). It may be added that Wellhausen later advanced to the position of E. Schwartz that John was executed in Jerusalem along with his brother James (*Das Evangelium Johannis* p. 100, *Einleitung in die drei ersten Evangelien*<sup>2</sup> p. 146), expressing himself with a dogmatism which, as Harnack, who adheres firmly to his rejection of this view, rightly said, did not make it any the more certain.

can only argue on the evidence we possess ; and short of actual demonstration the statement that he said anything of the kind ought to be regarded with the greatest suspicion. That Papias could have said it seems antecedently so incredible, in view of the consentient testimony of antiquity to the Apostle's residence at Ephesus and peaceful end, that the only attitude I can adopt to the theory is an attitude of sturdy incredulity. My reasons I have given elsewhere and need not repeat them here.<sup>1</sup>

The problem as to the apostolic authorship of the Revelation is complicated by the problem of the authorship of the Fourth Gospel. The Apostle may have written the whole of the Johannine literature as tradition affirms, or he may have written the Apocalypse but not the Gospel, or the Gospel but not the Apocalypse, and on either view different opinions may be held as to the Epistles, or he may have written neither Gospel nor Apocalypse. The same possibilities will be open if we substitute the Presbyter for the Apostle. The main question for us to consider is, Did the same hand compose both Gospel and Revelation or have they different authors, and if the latter, can either be attributed to the Apostle or to the Presbyter ?

The differences between the Gospel and the Revelation are so striking that most critics are of the opinion that different authors must be postu-

<sup>1</sup> *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament*, pp. 142-146.

lated. When an earlier date was commonly assigned to the Apocalypse, the difficulty of maintaining unity of authorship was not so serious. Now that a date in the reign of Domitian is generally accepted, it becomes extremely difficult to argue that, within a few years at most, the same author could have produced books so radically different.

In the first place we have the difference in language and style. Dionysius of Alexandria directed attention to this, and the inference which he drew that the books must have distinct authors is more and more widely accepted by unprejudiced scholars.<sup>1</sup> The argument is one which cannot be adequately illustrated for the English reader.<sup>2</sup> The grammatical solecisms and barbarisms which abound in it disappear in the English version, and some of them cannot be reproduced in English at all. The Fourth Gospel, on the other hand, is written in correct and simple Greek, quite different from that of the Apocalypse. Numerous statements and discussions of the phenomena are accessible and to these the Greek student must be referred. In place of any attempt to exhibit them for those who are limited to English, I will quote some characterisations of the Apocalypse from eminent philologists. In his work on New Testament

<sup>1</sup> This famous piece of early criticism is quoted by Eusebius, HE. vii. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Selwyn has attempted the task in *The Christian Prophets and the Prophetic Apocalypse*.



Grammar Radermacher says : " In any case it is the most uncultured literary production that has come down to us from antiquity, and it reveals a linguistic depth, such as is found elsewhere only in very illiterate papyri and inscriptions. Only from the fifth century A.D. onwards have we anything approximately like it in legends of the monks."<sup>1</sup> Again, " In none [of the New Testament writers] does freedom go the length of contempt for what is grammatically correct. The Apocalypse alone forms an exception in that, quite in the fashion of illiterate letters and curse-tablets, it simply sets itself above all rules of concord."<sup>2</sup> Prof. J. H. Moulton says : " Only nature can give the touch which stamps the highest literature, and every book of the New Testament bears this mark beyond cavil. The Apocalypse is perhaps the extreme case. Its grammar is perpetually stumbling, its idiom is that of a foreign language, its whole style that of a writer who neither knows nor cares for literary form. But just because the weird dialect is the native speech of its author, if he must use Greek, we accept it without apology ; and no anthology of the rarest gems in human literature could be complete without contributions from its pages."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Neutestamentliche Grammatik*, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> p. 182.

<sup>3</sup> *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. II., Part I., p. 3. On p. 16 he says that in the case of the Apocalypse " we have a writer who simply did not know the grammar of Greek except in shreds and patches." Mr. Howard, who is editing the second

The bearing of these phenomena on the relation between the Revelation and the Fourth Gospel has been very variously estimated. It has frequently been urged that the difference does not forbid identity of authorship if we can postulate an interval of twenty years or so between them. Accordingly some who held that Revelation was written before the destruction of Jerusalem considered that the Apostle's command of the language grew in the interval from the stage represented in the Greek of the Revelation to that exhibited in the Fourth Gospel. Hort was one of many who took this view, but Hort himself recognized that if the Apocalypse was written towards the end of the century, identity of authorship could hardly be maintained. He says: "It is, however, true that without the long lapse of time and the change made by the Fall of Jerusalem the transition cannot be accounted for. Thus date and authorship do hang together. It would be easier to believe that the Apocalypse was written by an unknown John than that both books belong alike to St. John's extreme old age" (p. xl.). This verdict may be heartily accepted, but of course it really carries us

volume of the Grammar with a piety and care for which Dr. Moulton's friends will be deeply grateful to him, closes the Introduction with a discriminating judgment on the character of the Greek and its relation to that of the Fourth Gospel (pp. 33f.). I may fitly in this connexion call attention to the discussion by Dr. Moulton's collaborator, Prof. George Milligan, *The New Testament Documents*, pp. 117-126.

only to a denial that the same author wrote both books, not to acceptance of apostolic authorship for one rather than the other, or indeed for either.

But the question may be raised whether the differences are such as the lapse of quarter of a century could adequately explain. And here I must take my stand with those who find this explanation unsatisfactory. If the author in question was the Apostle, we must remember that he was no longer young at the earliest date to which the Apocalypse could be assigned. But, apart from this, the differences are hardly of a kind which can be accounted for by development from one stage to the other. On this point the opinion of a very competent scholar who had made a close study of the language may be quoted. After setting aside the explanation that the difference is due "to a certain harshness and roughness of expression which comes with later years," on the ground that this is "not sufficiently supported by the general experience of literary men," he proceeds: "Equally untenable is the supposition that the difference is to be accounted for by an increased familiarity with the Greek tongue, gained during a long residence in Ephesus; for, even granting that the Apocalypse was written twenty-five years before the Gospel, its peculiarities of style are not such as spring from a writer's ignorance of the language in which he writes."<sup>1</sup> Again he says: "A space

<sup>1</sup> Milligan SPC p. 346.

of twenty-seven years spent in Ephesus, where the Greek tongue would be more used than in Jerusalem, offers no adequate explanation of the peculiar style of the book before us. Its solecisms are not such as proceed from ignorance of the Greek language, and they would not have been removed by greater familiarity with it."<sup>1</sup> It must be remembered of course that Milligan adopted the late date for the Apocalypse and attributed it as well as the Gospel to the Apostle John. But his judgment that the difference between the Greek of the two works is not that of a more and a less elementary acquaintance with it, is probably, with some qualifications, correct. Whether, however, the explanation that he offers is correct, is another matter. He believes that the author deliberately adopted the anomalies because he thought them adapted to his aim. He was well acquainted with the Greek language, and the irregularities are due "in some cases to design, in others to imitation of the Old Testament prophets." Heinrici also affirms that the solecisms and irregularities in sentence formation are intentional. He rejects the explanation that they are glosses foreign to the original text on the ground that they are firmly embedded in the context. Nor will he admit that they are due to the author's ignorance since the Greek of the Book is in other places in no way vulgar. He points out that the Greek oracles also are partial

<sup>1</sup> P. 353.

to barbarisms of style. The irregular, strange, and surprising are more effective.<sup>1</sup>

That there is an element of truth in this need not be denied. For example in the untranslatable description of God in Rev. i. 4 the preposition is followed by the nominative. But the author knew quite well the correct usage with that preposition and frequently employs it, twice in fact in this very sentence. The explanation here is that for the sake of greater solemnity he treats the Divine designation as indeclinable.<sup>2</sup> But this principle by no means covers the phenomena. The irregularities are in many cases really due to his imperfect mastery of the language. The fact that he sometimes goes right in constructions, where at other times he has gone wrong, must not be taken to prove that his syntax is deliberately irregular. It has a much more commonplace explanation. The author has, it is true, a considerable command of the language, but he combines with it considerable insensibility

<sup>1</sup> *Der litterarische Character der neutestamentlichen Schriften*, p. 85. Harnack says, "The language is more Hebraic than that of any other New Testament book. The author thought in Hebrew and wrote in Greek. But the gross violations of Greek Grammar are not to be explained from ignorance" (EBr<sup>6</sup> p. 498). He had previously said in another connexion, "only the mysterious appears divine" (p. 496).

<sup>2</sup> To us the indeclinable Divine name in i. 4 would sound uncouth. But J. Weiss rightly says that the words would make a solemn mystical impression on the first readers in virtue of their strikingly incorrect and barbarous form. Similarly Bousset says that there is a lofty solemnity in the indeclinable Divine name.

to idiom. His language is fluent and vigorous and often elevated, but whether he goes right or wrong in a particular construction is not infrequently a question of accident rather than design. Similarly as J. H. Moulton pointed out, an Englishman might have considerable command of either French or German, but often go wrong in his genders. Now in the Fourth Gospel we have grammatical correctness but on a rather low level. The author does not make blunders ; but he avoids them because he does not soar above an elementary style.

The difference then cannot be bridged by lapse of time, for the Greek of the Revelation can hardly by any process of development have grown into the Greek of the Gospel. Nor can it be explained as due entirely to design, since in numerous instances this seems to be inapplicable ; and it remains unexplained why a writer who *ex hypothesi* was all the while capable of writing correctly should not also have exhibited in the Gospel the kind of mastery which we find in the Apocalypse. The latter consideration tells also against the suggestion that in the Gospel the writer's Greek may have been corrected for him. It is interesting that Radermacher, who has expressed himself so emphatically on the debased style of the Revelation, should nevertheless write as follows : " There is no doubt that between the Gospel of John and the Apocalypse there are considerable linguistic and stylistic differences ; still I offer a warning against the



inference that the authorship was different. The conditions under which a literary work originated in antiquity were other than those which obtain to-day, and the better linguistic form of the Gospel might be explained as due to literary assistance" (p. 183). J. H. Moulton also offered this as a possible alternative to distinction of authors though I think without inclining to it.<sup>1</sup> It may, of course, be asked why he did not avail himself of similar help in the case of the Apocalypse. But here he might have been unwilling to have the language touched, since the condition of ecstasy in which he saw the vision, and heard the spoken word, perhaps also in which parts of the Book were written, may have seemed to forbid such correction. But we still do not understand why the Gospel should not exhibit the qualities which are so conspicuous in the Apocalypse.

Wendland estimates the language of the Revelation in very much the same way as Radermacher. He says that it stands by far the lowest of all the New Testament writings, below the level of literature. It is written in common, illiterate Greek, the best parallels to which are to be found in many of the magical papyri. But he says that the identity of the author of the Fourth Gospel with the author of Revelation is completely excluded by difference of language.<sup>2</sup> This verdict

<sup>1</sup> *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. I., p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> ULF p. 385.

should probably be accepted. It is undeniable on the other hand that there are marked similarities between the two works. These are generally recognized and they do not simply lie on the surface. Bousset, for example, is greatly impressed with them,<sup>1</sup> and J. Weiss still more.<sup>2</sup> Arnold Meyer, however, writing in Bousset's own Review of the second edition of the Editor's Commentary on the Revelation in most appreciative language, expresses the opinion that he has emphasized much too strongly the points of contact in language.<sup>3</sup> Bousset of course does not argue for identity of authorship. Nor yet does J. Weiss, though in his rather complicated theory, in which in A. Meyer's opinion "one impossibility seems to follow another," he does argue for a real literary relationship between the two. For our purpose it is not necessary to discuss this question in any detail, we have simply to state the general result. The similarities do not outweigh the pronounced differences. The impression which the books make is that the differences are not adequately accounted for by the theory that the same person wrote them at different periods of his life, or in the same period but with different objects and in different moods. The differences are such that identity of authorship can hardly be maintained.

<sup>1</sup> *Off. J.* <sup>2</sup> p. 179.

<sup>2</sup> *Off.* pp. 155f.

<sup>3</sup> *Th. R.* *z.* 137.

The positive result thus attained that the books are not by the same author is important if correct ; but it still leaves questions unanswered. John of Asia cannot have written both books ; he may be the author of the Fourth Gospel or of the Apocalypse. But again it is quite conceivable that he was the author of neither. And John of Asia may be the Apostle or he may be the Presbyter. At this point it may be interesting to look back to the position seventy years ago. In 1847 Baur's famous critical investigations of the canonical Gospels appeared. His results as to the Fourth Gospel had been published in 1844. In his *Critical Investigations* he refers with approval to the emphatic judgment both of Lücke and De Wette that the Fourth Gospel and the Revelation cannot be by the same author. He quotes from the fourth edition of De Wette's *Introduction* the following assertion : " Nothing is so firmly established in New Testament criticism as that the Apostle John, if the author of the Gospel and Epistle did not write the Apocalypse, if on the other hand the latter is his work, he cannot be the author of the other writings." Baur proceeds ; On this basis one might think that the further question which of the two works is genuinely Johannine would be easily decided. In fact all the external data are of such a character that the decision follows automatically. Not only does the whole tradition of the Apostle's residence in Asia for many years go back, as can

be clearly seen, to the apocalyptist not to the evangelist, but the Apocalypse has such ancient and unambiguous witnesses of apostolic origin, as is the case with few writings of the New Testament Canon and least of all with the Fourth Gospel. Clear though this is, antipathy to Revelation and sympathy for John have intervened with the whole force of subjective interest. The inability of the newer criticism to take its stand on the simple objective standpoint of the thing itself, is scarcely anywhere so astonishingly exhibited as in this, that starting from the generally accepted position that only the Gospel or the Revelation can be the genuine work of the Apostle John, but not both writings, while all the data point to the authenticity of Revelation the opposite conclusion is reached that the Gospel is genuine.<sup>1</sup> Later in the discussion he says: "The indubitable result to which we are led by all the features here brought together, is the identity of the Apostle with the Apocalyptist" (p. 376). He held firmly, as did all his followers, to the identity of the John of Asia with the Apostle. He says: "That the Apostle John in his later years, that is after the Apostle Paul disappeared from the scene of his apostolic labours, went to Asia Minor and settled down, in the city of Ephesus especially, is so well attested by several consentient accounts, that it cannot be doubted" (p. 369). Yet Baur's insistence on the divergence of the two

<sup>1</sup> *Evangelien*, pp. 345f.

documents did not blind him to their affinities. The essential distinction of standpoint, he says, of the Gospel and the Revelation must be held fast ; yet we must just as little fail to recognize that a certain analogy and relationship exists between them ; but only such a relationship as the evangelist could freely create from his own resources. It may justly be said that the Gospel is the spiritualized Apocalypse (p. 380).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The argument for identity of authorship based on theological affinities between the Gospel and the Apocalypse is stated very forcibly in one of the most recent important works on New Testament Theology, Schlatter's *Die Theologie des Neuen Testaments*. His discussion is to be found not in the section dealing with the Apocalypse (II. 77-92) but in that entitled "Der Prophet und der Evangelist" (II. 134-152). Reference should also be made to the treatment of this aspect by Feine, who in his comprehensive *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*<sup>2</sup> devotes a special discussion to the relation of Revelation to the other Johannine writings (pp. 639-643). He reaches no definite result, rightly regarding the problem of the origin of the Johannine writings as obscure ; but he considers that Gospel and Apocalypse are not unrelated and that we cannot set aside as "impossible" the tradition that traces both to the Apostle John. It may be added that Prof. George Milligan, who on the ground of language sums up against identity, continues : "No sooner, however, has this been said than one begins to fear that one is wrong, and that the deep-seated doctrinal harmony between the two books, combined with the strong external evidence, can only be adequately explained by unity of authorship" (*The New Testament Documents*, p. 125). He refers for proof of the doctrinal harmony to W. Milligan's *Discussions*, ch. v. "The Apocalypse and the Fourth Gospel."

On the other hand a very competent judge, Dr. Estlin Carpenter, has recently drawn a striking contrast between the two writings, leading to the conclusion that they "belong in fact to two entirely different modes of religious thought" (*Phases of Early Christianity*, pp. 6-10).

When Baur wrote, there was a strong tendency, as his remark indicates, among New Testament critics to regard the Fourth Gospel as apostolic. This was largely due to the influence of Schleiermacher, and it involved, for those who regarded the two works as by different authors, a denial of the apostolic origin of the Apocalypse. Baur, accepting the division, led a reaction in favour of the apostolic origin of the Revelation. We must no doubt take into account that his researches on the Fourth Gospel had convinced him, quite independently of any examination of the Revelation, that the Gospel could not be the work of the Apostle. Fully assured as he was that the books must have different authors, it did not necessarily follow for criticism so radical as his that the Apocalypse must therefore be apostolic. But he was too impressed with the strength of the evidence for the Apostle's residence in Asia to doubt that John of Asia was the son of Zebedee, while the theological position of the Book and the antagonism to Paul which he found in it fitted his general reconstruction of the development through which primitive Christianity passed. But he states very forcibly the case for the acceptance of the other alternative than that which was popular at the time. And if for the Apostle John we say simply John of Asia, leaving the identification with Apostle or Presbyter open, his position would command a large assent to-day.



We have already seen, however, that on grounds quite unconnected with the problem of the Fourth Gospel the Apocalypse can hardly be the work of the Apostle John. This would leave the apostolic origin of the Gospel open to acceptance, if on other grounds such acceptance seemed to be desirable. We might then assign the Revelation to the Presbyter John, though the residence of Apostle and Presbyter side by side and their simultaneous literary activity is not without its difficulties. It should be remembered that if John of Asia was the Apostle, we have comparatively little evidence for the connexion of the Presbyter with Asia. If, however, Revelation is not pseudonymous and not apostolic, we must assume the existence of a John of Asia distinct from the Apostle; and it is not improbable, if the Apostle wrote the Gospel, that the prophet to whom we owe the Revelation was the Presbyter. If, however, John of Asia was the Presbyter and the author of the Gospel, then the John who wrote the Apocalypse must have been some otherwise unknown John. And these possibilities are further complicated by the fact that sources have been employed in the Revelation and conceivably are to be found in the Fourth Gospel.

It is much easier to be confident as to negative than as to positive conclusions. That the Revelation was not written by the Apostle John nor by the author of the Fourth Gospel, and that it is not

pseudonymous, are results which can claim a high probability. But beyond this it is difficult to go with any assurance. The author was obviously familiar with the Churches of Asia and was no doubt highly esteemed in them as a prophet. We cannot infer from the authoritative tone of the Book that he held a position of authority over them, for Christ is the speaker and not John. Still he may have filled that position. Those who are able to reach a definite decision on the Fourth Gospel are in a much more favourable situation for dealing with the Apocalypse. But those, who like the present writer, feel the strength of the case on both sides and hence can pretend to no settled conviction on the matter, are necessarily unable to accept with confidence any view as to the authorship of the Apocalypse.

## CHAPTER V

### The Date.

THE discussion as to the date of the Apocalypse has had a curious history. In deference to our earliest evidence, the statement of Irenæus, the Book was generally considered to belong to the close of Domitian's reign ; but during the greater part of the nineteenth century there was a strong majority of critics in favour of a date some quarter of a century earlier. This view was entertained by both advanced and conservative scholars.<sup>1</sup> But some time before the close of the last century opinion began to move back to the traditional date, and for several years past it has secured the adhesion of the great majority of scholars.<sup>2</sup> The change has

<sup>1</sup> Lücke, Ewald, F. C. Baur, Hitzig, Bleek, Reuss, B. Weiss, Renan, Lightfoot, Westcott, Hort, Farrar may be mentioned. The later date was accepted by Alford, Godet, W. Milligan and others.

<sup>2</sup> In his review of Völter (TLZ vol. 7, col. 562) Harnack, as early as 1882, said : " Finally, it should be granted that many characteristic peculiarities of the Apocalypse are historically barely intelligible on the assumption that it originated under

been due partly to the development of critical analysis, partly to considerations affecting the problem of authorship.

The statement of Irenæus is as follows. Referring to the number of the Beast he says, "If it were necessary that his name should be openly proclaimed at the present time it would have been uttered by him who saw the revelation. For it was seen not long ago, but almost in our own generation at the end of the reign of Domitian" (V. xxx. 3; Eus. HE v. 8). This evidence is of

Galba, and that the ancient tradition as to the origin of the Book (under Domitian) is perhaps not entirely to be surrendered." In his article in EBr<sup>9</sup> he clearly recognizes that the phenomena of the Book do not all point in the same direction, but to two dates. Rev. xi. assumes that Jerusalem and the Temple are still uninjured and the reigning emperor of xvii. 10 is best identified with Galba; while the false Nero who best suits the case did not appear till about A.D. 75. Further the evidence of Irenæus points to a third date, the reign of Domitian. His tentative conclusion is, "the Apocalypse was written under Galba, but afterwards underwent revision under Vespasian, about 75-79, and perhaps in Domitian's reign of terror, about 93-96." In 1885 Mommsen (PRE ii. 197) had broken away from the prevalent view on the ground that the anticipation that Nero would return from the East with the Parthians was inconsistent with a date earlier than the time when Terentius Maximus (see pp. 125, 128, 131) found support among the Parthians. The objection based on xi. 1f. is set aside all too summarily: "here everything in the details is imaginary, and this trait is certainly either invented at pleasure or, if the view be preferred, possibly based on orders given to the Roman soldiers, who were encamped in Jerusalem after its destruction, not to set foot in what was formerly the Holy of Holies." The recognition that the Book reflects different historical situations saves us from recourse to such violent exegesis, and enables us to do justice to the conflicting phenomena.

primary importance.<sup>1</sup> For Irenæus was a native of Asia and a disciple of Polycarp, and even though the John who claims to have seen the visions may not have been the teacher of Polycarp, Irenæus would naturally be in a favourable position for knowing the tradition as to the origin of the Book which was current in the churches to which it was addressed. The precision of the statement inspires confidence. Irenæus is not only able to say in whose reign the revelation was seen, but to fix the period of the reign. Presumably he was drawing

<sup>1</sup> The attempts to discredit the evidence in order to strengthen the case for an earlier date do not deserve very serious consideration. Thus Jean Réville, whose discussion of the problems of the Book does not reach a high level, urges the fantastic solutions of the number of the Beast (e.g., Lateinos or Teitan) as a proof that these famous traditions of the elders of Asia Minor, of which he makes so much, have no historical value (*Le Quatrième Évangile*,<sup>2</sup> p. 38). But the solutions are not fantastic, and if they were, Irenæus might quite well have a trustworthy tradition as to date. Harnack justly says, "so precise a date from the pen of a second century writer who belonged to Asia Minor deserves the highest respect" (CAL p. 245). Bousset<sup>2</sup> (p. 134) also attaches very high value to it as a testimony there is no reason for doubting, though partly on the dubious ground that the account is not distorted, as in later notices, by the probably erroneous tradition that John was banished to Patmos under Domitian. He thinks (pp. 20, 40f., 134) that Irenæus derived the tradition from Papias, the date of whose work he places in the first two (or possibly three) decades of the second century (p. 39). The statement of Irenæus "it was seen not long ago, but almost in our own generation," is difficult, since Irenæus wrote his great work about A.D. 180-190, nearly a century after the closing period of Domitian's reign, and his birth probably fell at least a quarter of a century later than the death of Domitian. If the words were borrowed from Papias they would be appropriate to his time.

from ampler knowledge the bit of information which was relevant to his point.<sup>1</sup> Those who accept the earlier date have either to interpret the language differently or to discard the statement as untrustworthy. Some recent scholars have accepted another translation of the passage which goes back to Wetstein (vol. II. p. 746). Instead of "it was seen" they render "he was seen." In that case the meaning is that John was alive and visible till the close of Domitian's reign. This, however, while a legitimate, is a most improbable rendering. In the preceding clause the object of sight is the revelation. When the same verb follows in the succeeding clause and is changed from the active to the passive, the only natural subject is the object of the clause preceding. Hence we must render in the usual way "it was seen," in other words the vision was vouchsafed to John at the end of Domitian's reign. Another point which has an important bearing in this connexion, is that Irenæus twice asserts (II. xxxiii. 3, III. iii. 4) that John survived till the reign of Trajan, that is into the reign but one after that of Domitian. How strange, if this be the case, for him to say that he was seen at the end of the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Harnack (CAL p. 246): "The definite assertion that the Revelation was seen at the end of Domitian's reign, proves that Irenæus, or at least his informant, still possessed more intimate knowledge of the conditions under which the mysterious Book was written. The last years of Domitian (93-96) with their torments and persecutions suit—so much we can now say—specially well the mood which the Book expresses."



reign of Domitian! The statement appears to be simply chronological and not to have any reference to a possible identification of the Beast with Domitian, indicating the point at which the secret might be safely disclosed. The natural way of expressing this would have been to say, "he survived till Domitian was dead." The statement that John was accessible in person to that date would not be irrelevant; the point would be that so recently he was alive and therefore able to explain the significance of what he saw. But this point is equally secured by the other rendering, for obviously he did not receive the vision and write his Book after he was dead. And if Irenæus had wished to express the fact that John was still alive at that date he would surely not have used the word "he was seen" but have said "he survived," or something equivalent.<sup>1</sup>

There is, however, a further possibility. In A.D. 70 during the absence of Vespasian from Rome after his cause had triumphed, Domitian acted in Rome for his father, and (according to Suetonius)

<sup>1</sup> Another view has been suggested by the Latin translation of the verb (*visum est*), which implies a neuter subject, that we should interpret "his name was seen" (so Hammond, *Paraphrase*,<sup>4</sup> p. 857). This is open to the same objection as the rendering "he was seen," and no weight can be attached to the neuter rendering; fortunately the Greek original is here preserved by Eusebius, and the verb permits a subject of any gender to be supplied. It may be mentioned here that Hammond took the view that Irenæus referred to the period when Domitian was acting at Rome for his father Vespasian, not to Domitian's own reign about a quarter of a century later (p. 858).

in a most arbitrary and violent manner. It has been suggested that John was really banished by Domitian during this period. On his return, Vespasian took Nerva as his fellow-consul in A.D. 71. If Nerva was entrusted with the task of revising the sentences passed in the recent period of confusion, and if he quashed the sentence of banishment passed on John, then the tradition that John was banished by the Emperor Domitian and released after the tyrant's death by Nerva, who succeeded him as Emperor, would not be strictly accurate, but its origin would be easily understood.<sup>1</sup> On this hypothesis the revelation would not have been seen under Galba, as was commonly held by critics in the nineteenth century, but shortly afterwards under Vespasian. The theory is undoubtedly ingenious. It depends, however, on a very hypothetical reconstruction; it involves the presence of John in Rome at the time; and in any case it provides no more than a possible way of setting aside the tradition, if on other grounds it should be seen that a date during Domitian's reign was unacceptable. But unquestionably the tradition itself must be allowed full weight as it stands; and this amendment of it can come into consideration, only if we

<sup>1</sup> So Selwyn and Edmundson. Simcox put it forward without definitely committing himself to it (CGT pp. 71.); but, as is indicated in the preceding note, Hammond had long ago called attention to this period of regency as intended by Irenæus, and he explained xvii. 11 in the light of it, arguing that it identified Domitian with the eighth emperor (see below p. 82).

have strong reasons for believing that the date assigned by Irenæus is much too late.

Clement of Alexandria and Origen mention John's banishment to Patmos without recording the Emperor's name. Victorinus says definitely that John was condemned to the mines (or quarries) in Patmos by Domitian, and there saw the Apocalypse. Jerome gives a similar account. Both assert that John's release followed on the death of Domitian, a statement made also by Eusebius. The testimony in the early period is practically unanimous. Epiphanius, who was Jerome's contemporary, in his treatise on heresies, written about A.D. 375, asserts that John was banished to Patmos and returned from it in the reign of Claudius. Claudius was Nero's predecessor and his reign extended from A.D. 41 to 54. A date so early is now admitted on all hands to be incredible, and the language of the writer exhibits a carelessness and inaccuracy only too characteristic of him. But it is possible, though most improbable, that Claudius here means Nero, for Nero had Claudius as one of his names. Epiphanius may derive his information from Hippolytus, and the latter may have meant Nero, and perhaps even used the name Nero Claudius. But Dionysius Barsalibi tells us that Hippolytus dated the Revelation in the reign of Domitian. And, as a pupil of Irenæus, it is most unlikely that he would do anything else. Both of the Syriac Versions of the Revelation give in the

title the statement that John was banished by Nero ; but " The Synopsis concerning the life and death of the prophets, apostles and disciples of the Lord," says that John was banished to Patmos by Trajan, and returned after his death, but adds that some place the banishment under Domitian. Theophylact also puts it under Trajan, but elsewhere gives a date which would bring it into the time of Nero. The dissentient voices, however, count for extremely little. The really weighty testimony of antiquity is nearly unanimous for a date under Domitian.<sup>1</sup>

It is, then, on the internal evidence that the case for an earlier date must almost entirely rest. It is not unfair to say that considerations not purely critical have been allowed to influence the decision. It was a striking paradox that the Tübingen School which left Paul with only four or, as put by Hilgenfeld in a more moderate form, with only seven authentic Epistles, and brought most of the New Testament documents down to a late date, should in the case of the Apocalypse have affirmed apostolic authorship and a date quarter of a century earlier than that assigned by tradition. It has been said

<sup>1</sup> On this Hort's conclusion may be quoted, since he strongly favoured the earlier date : " On the one hand the tradition as to Domitian is not unanimous ; on the other it is the prevalent tradition, and it goes back to an author likely to be the recipient of a true tradition on the matter, who moreover connects it neither with Rome nor with an emperor's personal act. If external evidence alone could decide, there would be a clear preponderance for Domitian " (p. xx.).

that this was due to a desire to get rid of apostolic testimony to the Divinity of Christ. Assuming that the Fourth Gospel and the Apocalypse were by different authors, the apostolic origin of the latter was asserted so that the testimony of the Gospel might be discredited as non-apostolic. This hardly puts the case fairly. One of the most striking features of the Apocalypse is its lofty Christology. Nowhere in the New Testament is the Divinity of Christ more emphatically proclaimed (see pp. 190-192). Had their purpose been to get rid of apostolic witness to our Lord's Divinity, the Tübingen critics could scarcely have gone more clumsily to work than in claiming the Revelation for the Apostle John.<sup>1</sup> Indeed one may say with confidence that, had the Apocalypse never been written,

<sup>1</sup> It should be observed, however, that the Tübingen critics did show a tendency to tone down the Christology of the Apocalypse. See Baur's *Evangelien*, p. 381, where it is explained away to a considerable extent. Schwegler went further and argued that Rev. i.-iii. should be detached from the rest of the Book. In that way the original work by the Apostle John was relieved of a section in which some of the most exalted claims were made for Christ. Presumably what influenced both critics was the feeling that a Christology so elevated as this seems to be was hardly credible in an apostolic writing, and since it was the fixed point of departure that John was the author, the difficulty had to be mitigated by a minimising interpretation, and might be further reduced (as by Schwegler) if i.-iii. originally formed no part of the Book. It must be remembered that the Fourth Gospel also has suffered from similar exegetical, not to say critical, violence; so that Baur and Schwegler, had their object been to get rid of apostolic witness to the Divinity of Christ, might have anticipated some more recent expositors in their interpretation of this Gospel.

the Tübingen attitude to the Fourth Gospel would not have been substantially changed. The theory as a whole was reached on quite other lines and held for quite other reasons. Nor indeed is it to be for one moment supposed that the acceptance of the Fourth Gospel as apostolic would have carried with it an acceptance of the theology it taught. What really commended the view that the Apostle John wrote the Revelation was partly its Jewish-Christian character, partly the belief that it supplied documentary evidence for that antagonism of the original apostles to Paul and his teaching, which was one of the fundamental elements in the Tübingen theory. This consideration bears on the authorship more directly than on the date. Still, it bears on the date in this sense, that such activity of John in Asia, designed directly to counterwork the activity of Paul and discredit his teaching, would be historically more intelligible at the end of the sixties than in the nineties.

The question of date, however, has been affected not a little on the opposite side by the desire to claim for the Apostle John the authorship both of the Revelation and the Fourth Gospel. A very serious difficulty in the way of this has, from the days of Dionysius of Alexandria, been recognized to lie in the marked differences between the two works, notably in language. This difficulty, it has been thought, might be greatly diminished if from twenty-five to thirty years could be placed between



the two works. And inasmuch as it was recognized with practical unanimity that the Gospel was written late in the century, the only alternative was to place the Apocalypse at the earlier date. Of course there was strong evidence in early tradition for identity of authorship, and there were unquestionably certain features in Revelation itself which suggested the earlier date. But these features may be otherwise explained, and it is better to eliminate any appeal to identity of authorship from the consideration of date, since this identity is now very widely denied.

I have elsewhere alluded<sup>1</sup> to the opening vision of the eleventh chapter in which the Temple is measured, apparently for preservation. This implies that the Temple was still standing, and the date in that case cannot be later than A.D. 70. But this presents no difficulty on the theory that this section was taken by the author from an earlier source. It bears, in fact, on the face of it its Jewish rather than Jewish Christian origin.

Another piece of evidence raises far more intricate and tantalising problems. In xvii. 9f. we read, "Here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sitteth : and they are seven kings ; the five are fallen, the one is, the other is not yet come ; and when he cometh, he must continue a little while." Assuming that the seven kings are Roman Emperors it seems

<sup>1</sup> pp. 29-32, 71, 290-292.

at first sight a very simple matter to determine the author's date, for presumably he is writing when the sixth is on the throne, five having died, the seventh having yet to come. But the reckoning raises serious difficulties. It is generally assumed that the enumeration should start with the founding of the Empire, but those who take this view are divided on the question whether Julius Cæsar or Augustus is to be regarded as the first emperor. There is also in all calculations the question as to the inclusion of Galba, Otho and Vitellius. Further, are we justified in including in our reckoning of the first five kings all who had reigned, or should a more restricted sense be put on the words "have fallen" than is done by those who make it simply equivalent to "have died"? Or again are we to include only those emperors who bore the title "Augustus," that name of blasphemy? Once more, are we right in the starting point or should our reckoning begin at some point later than Augustus?

It may be convenient to deal first with the suggestions which take a later emperor than Augustus as the starting point. In his *Paraphrase*<sup>4</sup> (p. 858) Hammond starts with Claudius, under whom he thinks John's banishment took place. It will not be amiss to quote his explanation:

"A fourth argument will be taken from the account of the *eight kings* or *Emperors* chap. 17, 10, which cannot, I believe, otherwise be made intelligible, but by beginning the account from Claudius, so that he, and Nero, Galba, Otho, Vitellius, shall be the five that were fallen, and then

Vespasian (in whose time I suppose these visions were committed to writing by Saint John) being the sixth, shall be the *one is*, and *Titus* the seventh, *that is not yet come, and when he comes shall stay but a little while*, reigning but two years and two months, and then the *beast that was and is not, and is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goes to destruction*, will fall out to be *Domitian*, to whom (and to whom only of all the Emperors, nay of all men in any story) all those distinctive characters will appertain, as that he exercised the office of the Emperor, and was called *Emperor at Rome*, when *Vespasian* was gone into *Judæa*, and after his return became a private man again, delivered up the Empire to him, and so *was, and is not*, and then was the eighth, reckoning from *Claudius* as the first) and the son of *one of the seven*, viz., of *Vespasian*, and should be a bloody persecutor, and accordingly punished, and so go to destruction."

Mr. Edmundson also begins his count with Claudius. He argues that the Book deals only with what he calls the Neronian cycle, that is "the period during which the Church and the Empire, Christ and Antichrist were first brought face to face as forces irreconcilably opposed." Claudius is included in the series because he adopted Nero as his son and heir, and because in his reign Christianity came in contact with the imperial power at Rome. His reckoning is as follows. The five who have fallen, that is have died by a violent death, are Claudius, Nero, Galba, Otho, Vitellius. The sixth, the one who is, signifies Domitian as acting emperor. The one not yet come is Vespasian, who had not yet arrived in Rome, and who when he had assumed the Government would continue only a little while, since Nero the eighth, who was one of the seven, would soon return from the East to take his seat on

the throne. This view is not so plausible as Hammond's, for Domitian could not by any legitimate exaggeration be described as emperor. If we start with Claudius and include Galba, Otho and Vitellius, the sixth emperor must be Vespasian.

A similar view is that attractively stated by Dr. C. H. Turner,<sup>1</sup> but he begins his series with Nero. Apparently his list is as follows : Nero, Galba, Otho, Vitellius, Vespasian, Titus, Domitian, Nero. He urges that the Beast is the antichristian power. Accordingly Julius Cæsar and Augustus ought not to be included among the seven kings, while the immediate successors of Augustus can in no sense be said to have finally declared themselves against Christianity. "It is with Nero that the Empire first ranges itself with Antichrist ; it will be in the second Nero that the identification will be complete." This interpretation is very tempting, yet it is exposed to some difficulties. A Christian could hardly overlook the fact that Jesus had been condemned to death by a Roman procurator in the reign of Tiberius, so that from the very first Christianity and the Empire had been brought into collision. Moreover it hardly does justice to the Apocalypse to speak of the Beast as the antichristian power. That is, of course, correct ; but it is too limited. It is more properly the antitheistic power (cf. 2 Thess. ii.4) ; the conflict which has already begun and is to be pushed to the most terrible extremities, is that

<sup>1</sup> *Studies in Early Church History.*

occasioned by the imperial claim to receive that worship which is due to God alone. Now this had been characteristic of the empire from the time of Augustus onwards, though in varying forms and degrees. But the practice in its worst form, that is the worship of the living emperor, had been known in Asia as early as the reign of Augustus, and no one had pressed his claim to divine honours more vehemently than Caligula nor had gone such lengths in his determination to enforce it on notorious monotheists like the Jews, whose conscientious convictions wiser Roman statesmen were most reluctant to violate. It would seem then that the enumeration of the seven heads should not begin so late as either Claudius or Nero, and, if so, the only real alternative is to make it include the emperors from the first onwards.

But are we to identify the first emperor with Julius Cæsar or with Augustus? Both reckonings were employed by ancient writers. Josephus, IV. Ezra iv. and Suetonius take Julius Cæsar, while Tacitus takes Augustus to be the first emperor.<sup>1</sup> In the former case the list of the first six emperors is presumably Julius Cæsar, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero. The identity of the seventh is disputed because we may either include

<sup>1</sup> The authorities for the former reckoning are given by Renan (p. 407), who adopts this view. It is also accepted by Bruston. Mommsen begins the series with Augustus (PRE ii. 197), and this is the generally accepted view.

or omit the three rulers who held brief sway between Nero and Vespasian. But probably this whole reckoning should be set aside since it makes Nero the reigning emperor, and this is excluded by the other evidence, which is intelligible only on the supposition that Nero's reign was at an end. But ought all of the emperors to be reckoned? The writer says "five are fallen." Usually this is interpreted to mean that five are dead and the commentators generally do not mention any alternative interpretation. Alford called attention to the inappropriateness of the word to emperors like Augustus and Tiberius who died in their beds; but he rejected the whole line of interpretation here discussed which assumes that the seven kings are Roman emperors, taking the heads to be empires, Egypt, Nineveh, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, the Christian empire. Hermann takes the verb to imply that those who are mentioned had not died a natural death. He begins with Julius Cæsar, makes Nero the fifth emperor, Domitian the sixth, Nerva the seventh, and the eighth the returning Nero. This need not be discussed, and reasons have already been given why Mr. Edmundson's scheme, which also assumes that the five perished by a violent death, is to be rejected. Probably we should abide by the usual interpretation, explaining the choice of the verb as intended to suggest a fall from the high imperial position (cf. ii. 5). If we include in the list only the emperors who bore that



"name of blasphemy" Augustus, the five would be Augustus, Tiberius, Claudius, Nero, Galba, the sixth would be Otho, or if Galba and Otho are omitted, the fifth would be Vespasian and the sixth Titus. But probably the list should not be restricted in this way.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly we start with Augustus and, without omitting any of the emperors, make the five who have fallen to be Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero. The choice for the sixth emperor must then lie between Galba and Vespasian. It is quite possible that this verse was written under Galba. It is nevertheless unlikely, not simply in view of the brevity of Galba's reign, but because the writer apparently anticipates Nero's return at the head of the Parthians, and this seems to carry us down to the later years of Vespasian (pp. 96f., 125, 128, 131). Probably then we should take Vespasian to be the sixth Emperor, on the throne at the time.

But with whom did this writer identify the seventh head? Various suggestions are possible. He may have thought of Titus, in which case the brevity of his reign would be accounted for by the anticipation of Nero's speedy return.<sup>2</sup> In that

<sup>1</sup> xvii. 3 implies that there was more than one blasphemous title, so that there is no need to restrict the term to "Augustus."

<sup>2</sup> Düsterdieck supposed that already in Vespasian's reign there were rumours of Domitian's plots against Titus, just as at a later date it was reported that he had poisoned him. But this would have been a very precarious basis for the prediction. Nor is there any warrant for supposing that, even had the writer of this verse anticipated an eighth emperor, he would have

case the number seven would not be exceeded, as Nero was already included within it. Or he may have suggested that Nero would displace Vespasian and count him twice over since he had a double reign. On this question, however, we need not linger. The important matter for us is that this verse was presumably written, possibly while Galba but more probably while Vespasian was on the throne. Further, the writer seems to anticipate that with the next king the series of Roman emperors will end.

But the following verse (xvii. 11) creates a fresh difficulty. It runs: "And the beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven; identified him with Domitian. It is more likely that he expected only seven. Another explanation is that the writer was aware of Titus' delicacy of constitution. But in that case the prediction would have been still more precarious, for it would be very questionable if he would outlive his father. Probably the prediction is due to a combination of two elements. The author knew from the apocalyptic tradition that there were to be seven emperors. But he also expected the very speedy overthrow of the Imperial power, so that only a brief period could elapse before it took place. He says nothing as to the time remaining to the reigning emperor because this might be dangerous; he anticipates a seventh emperor, but for him only a very little time at most is left. Mommsen says with reference to his silence as to the reigning emperor's name, that mention of it "had its risk, and some consideration towards the one 'who is' besseems even a prophet" (PRE ii. 198). But there is no need to accept Mommsen's view (pp. 197f.) that the undefined seventh is incongruous and is only added "because the writer hesitated to predicate immediately of the reigning emperor the short government of the last ruler and his overthrow by the returning Nero." Wendland is probably mistaken in regarding the mention of Titus' short reign as a prophecy after the event (HRK<sup>2</sup> p. 383.).

and he goeth into perdition." While in xvii. 10 it is assumed that there can only be seven emperors of Rome, because the Beast has only seven heads, the author of this verse has to reckon with the eighth emperor.<sup>1</sup> At first sight the most obvious hypothesis is that the eighth emperor is Domitian. In that case this verse might have been written under Titus and the eighth emperor might have been added because the writer could not see in the reigning emperor the qualities he expected to characterise the last of the kings. Or more probably, it might seem, he would be writing under Domitian, and was thus forced to recognize that the number seven had actually been exceeded.

This explanation, however, is open to grave objections, for the writer seems to identify the eighth emperor with one of the seven, the one who was and is not. We can hardly doubt accordingly that the eighth emperor is identified with Nero. Now it is perfectly true that Domitian was regarded by contemporaries as a second Nero,<sup>2</sup> and several scholars allege this fact in favour of the view that

<sup>1</sup> On the problem here presented Harnack has written more than once. In his "Nachwort" to Vischer's dissertation (pp. 135f.) he argues that the writer of xvii. 11 was not identical with the writer of xvii. 10, but wrote under Domitian, the eighth emperor. The obscurity of the expression lies in the nature of any attempt to demonstrate that  $7+1=7$ . The question is discussed again, and on the same general lines in CAL 245f.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Juvenal's famous description of Domitian as "a bald Nero" (calvo Neroni), and at a later date Tertullian's "Domitianus, portio Neronis de crudelitate" (*Apologeticus* v.). The whole

Domitian is intended. But if the writer really meant that the eighth was actually one of the seven who had disappeared and was to return, this view must be set aside. The author does not mean someone of a similar character to Nero, he means Nero himself. The eighth emperor is in that case the fifth reigning for a second time; and since his reign belongs to the future, the actual eighth emperor could hardly have succeeded to the throne. Apparently then we are brought to the conclusion that xvii. 10 was written under Vespasian, xvii. 11 under Titus.

But this again is not without difficulties. What the author has in mind is the expectation of Nero's return. In the reign of Titus, however, this must have taken the form of the belief that Nero had not actually died but escaped to the East and would march with the Parthians against Rome. There is nothing in xvii. 11 inconsistent with this form of the Nero legend. But this verse looks back to xvii. 8a, "the beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and is about to come up out of the abyss, and to go into perdition." Here the legend appears in the form that Nero is expected to return from hell, and this

sentence, which is otherwise not without importance for the criticism of our Book is thus rendered by Souter, "Domitian too had tried the same experiment as Nero, with a large share of Nero's cruelty, but inasmuch as he retained something of humanity also, he was easily able to change his course, even restoring those whom he had banished" (J. E. B. Mayor's edition, p. 21). Other passages representing Domitian as another Nero are quoted by Swete in his note.

can hardly be earlier than the closing part of Domitian's reign. No satisfactory solution of this difficulty is perhaps to be found. Perhaps the simplest suggestion would be that the reference to the abyss in xvii. 8 was not originally in the text, but has been inserted from xi. 7. It may be observed that neither in xvii. 8b nor in xvii. 11, though based in each case on xvii. 8a, is there any reference to the abyss. So far then as the evidence of this verse goes, we seem not to be carried down beyond the reign of Titus. It must of course be remembered that a later author might well incorporate this passage, interpreting it, as many others have done, of Domitian.

The reference in xi. 7 to "the beast that cometh up out of the abyss" suits the later form of the Nero legend and may therefore be presumed to have originated in the reign of Domitian. Yet even here some caution is necessary, for this feature may have been due simply to the eschatological tradition.

Another passage may supply us with a more definite indication of Domitianic date. The opening of the third seal (vi. 5f.) is followed by the vision of the black horse whose rider held the balance in his hands. A voice cries, "A measure of wheat for a penny and three measures of barley for a penny; and the oil and the wine hurt thou not." The significance of this is that while corn is to be very dear, wine and oil will be cheap. It has been



argued by S. Reinach,<sup>1</sup> who has been followed by Harnack and several other scholars, that this was suggested by the policy of Domitian with reference to the cultivation of corn and the vine. Suetonius (*Domit.* vii.) says that Domitian observing that wine was very plentiful, whereas corn was scarce, prohibited the planting of new vineyards in Italy and ordered a large diminution of the existing vineyards in the provinces. But he adds that he did not persevere in following up the matter. Later he tells us that his reason for not pursuing this policy was personal fear; but more probably it was due to protests from

<sup>1</sup> "La mévente des vins sous le haut empire romain," *Revue Archéologique*, 1901, pp. 350-374. Wetstein quotes the passage in Suetonius without suggesting any allusion in our passage to Domitian's edict. Farrar calls attention to the edict, as Moffatt also has noticed, but without tracing any connexion with our passage, as indeed he could not have done with his view of the date. He says: "In Rome immense abundance of wine was a frequent concomitant of extreme scarcity of corn. So marked was the evil, that Domitian endeavoured to secure by edict the diminution of the vinelands, and the devotion of wider areas to the cultivation of cereals for human food." On Roman policy in this respect see Mommsen *PRE* i. 108f., especially the following: "If one of the most careful administrators who held the imperial office, Domitian, issued orders that in all the provinces at least half of the vines should be destroyed—which, it is true, were not carried out—we may thence infer that the diffusion of the vine culture was at all events subjected to serious restriction on the part of the Government." So far as I am aware no one has observed that the credit of first recognizing the allusion seems to belong to Huschke, who after an explanation of the conditions says that our passage was written in special and fresh recollection of Domitian's edict (A.D. 92) to cut down the vines in the provinces (p. 35). The date of Huschke's book is 1860. An excellent article is devoted to the subject by Moffatt (*Exp.* October, 1908).



the provinces against unfair discrimination in favour of Italy. "The trade" won; hence the writer anticipates that while wheat and barley will be at famine price, wine will be cheap since the vineyards will be unharmed. The original decree was apparently made in 92, so that the date of the reference would be about 93, though it might be a little later. It is not clear why there is any reference in this connexion to oil, and this has been urged, for example by Schürer, against Reinach's view. It is not possible to build very much on the coincidence; Wellhausen says he can discover no allusion (*Analyse* p. 10), and Clemen also rejects it (PCNS p. 118); yet it is interesting as tending to confirm the Domitianic date.

Turning now to the general situation which the Book implies we may touch first on the relations between the Church and the Empire. The background of the Book is one of persecution. The Roman Empire is the instrument of Satan in his violent assault on the Church. Unquestionably this is the case. Yet an important qualification must be made. If the author has incorporated oracles of Jewish origin we must allow for the possibility, and indeed the probability, that in some cases the language of the Book originally had reference to the sufferings of Jews rather than of Christians. The author finding these allusions in his sources might make them definitely apply to the experiences of the Church. And in such cases

it would scarcely be legitimate to press the language as if every detail of this secondary application was literally exact. The author might introduce phrases or clauses to make his own application clear, but yet leave the original description untouched, if it corresponded to the new conditions in a general way. Thus when we read, "And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus," the reference to Rome's persecution of the Christians is unmistakable. Yet if the first clause stood alone, it would even more naturally apply to the appalling number of those who had fallen in the war of the Jews with Rome. Whether this interpretation of the clause is correct or not depends on our answer to the question whether the author was employing a Jewish source at this point.

But with the fullest allowance for this element of ambiguity, it is unquestionable that the Book has in its present form a background of persecution. Unhappily the whole subject of the relations between the Church and the Empire is involved in great obscurity, so that it is somewhat precarious to use hypotheses as to the history of these relations as a test for the date of New Testament documents. All that anyone who is no expert in the legal and administrative questions involved can do is to weigh, as best he can, the arguments of the experts and thus reach some tentative conclusion. This is attempted in another chapter (pp. 104-114), where

the conclusion is reached that as early as the reign of Nero the distinction of Christianity from Judaism had been clearly recognized and Christianity itself apart from any offences supposed to be associated with it was regarded as criminal. This seems to leave the possibility open that the Book may have been written as early as the reign of Nero. But since one persecution seems already to have taken place and a second persecution is anticipated, it seems more probable that the Neronian persecution lies in the past and a fresh outbreak is anticipated, presumably that under Domitian. The form which the conflict between the Church and the Empire takes in the Book also favours a date under Domitian, since he insisted, beyond all emperors save Caligula, on his divinity, and required that divine honours should be paid to him.

On the other hand it is argued that the general background of the Book is strongly in favour of the earlier date. The scourges from which the empire suffered in the years before the fall of Nero have been depicted by Renan with a master's hand and with gaudier colours in Farrar's rhetorical pages. The weighty statement of Hort<sup>1</sup> deeply impressed Sanday, who seemed inclined to return to the earlier date which he had advocated in a striking passage of his Bampton Lectures.<sup>2</sup> In a more recent

<sup>1</sup> pp. xxv.f. Sanday's judgment on it is given in the Preface, p. iv.

<sup>2</sup> pp. 373f. The volume was published in 1893.

series of Bampton Lectures Edmundson has forcibly stated the same argument (pp. 176-178).

But an argument of this kind must be used with caution. It cannot outweigh positive evidence on the other side, and of course the argument is affected by the recognition that different situations are reflected in the Book. And it is not enough to show that a particular period is rich in catastrophes, physical and political. For this may be equally true of other periods, about which we are in detail far less informed. But apart from all these considerations the argument is to be distrusted. No apocalyptist could depict the last times without painting his picture in lurid colours ; and in any case the author, whether he wrote before the destruction of Jerusalem or a generation later, had lived through the former period. We cannot treat the Revelation as if it stood by itself. There is a large traditional element in its anticipations and imagery. War, famine, pestilence, fire, tempest and earthquake, convulsions of society to match those of Nature, stars falling from the crumpled heaven as the sky is rolled up like a scroll, the sun turned to blackness and the moon to blood, persecution of the saints and unparalleled tribulation, these are the conventional features characteristic of apocalyptic. And as to the second point even if it were admitted that it was precisely the horrors of Nero's later years, including perhaps the period that immediately followed his death, which inspired the apocalyptist's

descriptions, this would not necessarily imply the earlier date for his work. For such scenes leave their indelible impression on imagination and memory, nor is there anything in the Apocalypse to justify the assertion that its portents and terrors can have been suggested only by a vivid memory of horrors quite recently witnessed.

It may be granted that the case for a date in the reign of Domitian has been sometimes overstated. But this date is probably to be accepted. The indications of earlier date are not to be denied, but may be adequately explained by the view that some elements in the Book are earlier than the destruction of Jerusalem. And on the other side we have the external evidence which is almost all in favour of the later date. We have the form which the conflict between the Church and Empire has assumed, the stage which the development of the belief that Nero would return has reached, and perhaps the reference to the sparing of the oil and wine.

Mommsen's view that the Book was written in the latter part of the reign of Vespasian<sup>1</sup> has in its

<sup>1</sup> It is curious that eminent scholars should make a mistake as to Mommsen's view. Ramsay (Exp. 4th series, vol. viii. p. 16) says, "He assigns its composition to about A.D. 70." Bury (in his edition of Gibbon vol. ii. p. 25), Wellhausen (*Skizzen* p. 222), J. E. B. Mayor (*Tertulliani Apologeticus* p. 175) say that Mommsen dates the Book under Domitian. Ramsay's date is several years too early, and I suspect it may be a misprint. In PRE ii. 64f. (see also p. 197), Mommsen says it was the pseudo-Nero, Terentius Maximus, who "gave the impulse to the

favour the probably correct identification of the reigning emperor in xvii. 10 with Vespasian; while the anticipation that Nero would return with the Parthians suits this period of Vespasian's reign far better than its beginning. But it does not account so well as a later date for the reference to the eighth emperor, nor for the prominence given to the worship of the emperor, nor for the belief that Nero would return from the abyss, while it has no support whatever in tradition.

Revelation of John." He emerged "in the last years of Vespasian," and found support among the Parthians. Artabanus, because Titus declared against him, seems to have adopted the pretender's cause, but, soon after, the Parthian government gave him up to Domitian. This leaves the possibility open of the closing years of Vespasian, the reign of Titus, or that of Domitian. But Mommsen's view is not really doubtful. He adopts on p. 197 the reckoning, according to which Vespasian is the sixth head, he "who is," *i.e.*, the reigning emperor; and the part played by Terentius Maximus excludes the early years of his reign.

It may be added that J. V. Bartlet (*Apostolic Age*) argues for a date in the reign of Vespasian, and more precisely for "some date like 75-80" (p. 104). Similarly C. A. Scott places it about A.D. 77, if it was written by the same hand and at the same time; but he leaves the alternative open, that it may have been "composed in the reign of Vespasian, and reissued, with additions by the same hand, after the death of Domitian" (*Century Bible*, p. 56).

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## CHAPTER VI.

### The Historical Background.

**I**N 175 B.C. Seleucus Philopater, king of Syria, son of Antiochus the Great, fell a victim to a conspiracy promoted by his minister Heliodorus, who desired to replace him. The traitor was foiled by Antiochus, brother of Seleucus, who contrived to gain the throne. He became Antiochus IV., of sinister memory, better known as Antiochus Epiphanes, the title asserting his claim to manifest divinity. Astute in policy, lavish in expenditure, talented and strong-willed, habitually compromising his royal and divine dignity by the pranks of a buffoon, his conduct so eccentric that it seemed to indicate a strain of insanity, he reminds us most forcibly of Caligula and Nero. A fanatic for Western culture, he saw in Greek civilization an ideal to be imposed on his empire, blending its diverse races into a unity. Such a policy need fear no opposition from polytheists. But from Jews, loyal to their Law and uncompromising in their monotheism, resistance

pushed to the extreme might be anticipated. It is true that even here the omens might seem favourable to Antiochus ; for there was a large and powerful party in Judah, led by an apostate priesthood, which had accepted with enthusiasm Greek ways of life. But there were deep reserves of fidelity in the people ; and when in 168 B.C. Antiochus forbade the practice of Judaism on pain of death, forced the Jews to sacrifice to heathen deities and to eat unclean food, defiled the Temple with the abomination of desolation and burnt the copies of the Law, he was met with passive resistance resulting in many martyrdoms, and then under the leadership of Mattathias and his sons, notably Judas Maccabæus, with active opposition, crowned with incredible success. The story cannot be told again here. But its direct bearing on our subject forbids us to ignore it. Here the problem which called forth the Book of Revelation appears for the first time. Reasons of statecraft, which might plausibly be defended as wisely designed for the good of the commonwealth, were resisted to the death by the unflinching hostility of those who saw in compliance a deep and unthinkable disloyalty to the Supreme Object of their faith and adoration. No lower loyalty to earthly king or empire could excuse any policy of compromise ; there could be no faltering in the resolution at all costs to obey God rather than man. And as the requirement that Christians should worship the emperor called forth the Book of

Revelation, so the Maccabean crisis gave rise to the Book of Daniel, which exercised so profound an influence on later literature of that type, not least on the Christian Apocalypse. It is also of interest to us that the Syrian terror drove the Jews into friendly relations with Rome.

For our purpose it is needless to relate how the Jews regained first their religious liberty and then their political independence, or to follow the disenchanting story of the swift decline from the lofty levels of religious and patriotic enthusiasm to worldly policy, to party strife, and hideous tyranny. At length Rome intervened. Pompey came to Jerusalem and there was an end of national independence (63 B.C.). Julius Cæsar granted the Jews many benefits. He was assassinated in 44 B.C. and it seemed as if the nascent Empire had received its death-stroke; but the "death-stroke was healed" when Augustus was firmly seated on the throne. Herod was favoured both by Mark Antony and Augustus. At his death his realm was divided; Archelaus inherited the kingdom of Judæa, and when Augustus banished him for misgovernment, Judæa became a Roman province, governed by procurators. Rome was tolerant in its policy, its standard of justice was high for those times, and its administration efficient. But the Jews were apt to be impracticable, they were proud and embittered; while the procurators were often of an inferior type, though in judging them we must allow not only for

the difficulties of their position but for the prejudice of the historian.

One episode is of importance for us. Caius Caligula, the successor of Tiberius and emperor from A.D. 37-41, came into serious collision with the Jews. Weak in body and of slender abilities, vulgar in his tastes and inconceivably depraved in his pleasures, lust, cruelty, and ostentation the chief springs of his enjoyment, he gave the world a lesson in the possibilities of autocracy, when the autocrat recognizes no limits save his own will, and bends everything to the gratification of his own ambition and desire. In this case the autocrat was the more dangerous that his mind was unhinged. Profuse in his expenditure, he squandered the vast resources accumulated by the thrift of Tiberius, and resorted to confiscation of the fortunes of the wealthy, executed on false charges of treason, and to the plunder of rich provinces. Yet his popularity in the early part of his reign was unbounded, for men breathed freely after the terror of Tiberius' later years ; and the populace forgives all things to an open-handed despot, though he be a mountebank in his behaviour and bloodthirsty and bestial in his pleasures. Early in his reign the vice in which he wallowed brought on a dangerous illness, which unhappily for the world did not prove fatal ; this "death-stroke was healed." The empire was filled with sympathy for the sufferer and consternation at the prospect of his death. After his recovery he

went from bad to worse, and that in every way ; his cruelties and exactions increased, and he lost even the favour of the mob.

Under the pernicious influence of Herod Agrippa, during the last period of Tiberius, Caligula had imbibed oriental ideas of monarchy, and when he gained the throne he lost little time in putting them into practice. His subjects were to him simply his slaves, however high their rank. At length he seemed to himself no longer a mere man, he claimed to be a god, supreme among deities as he was among men. Such deification of the emperor in his lifetime would seem distasteful or ridiculous to many ; but to the Orientals it was not uncongenial, and to Westerns it involved, however unseemly, no question of principle. The Jews alone found it impossible to yield. In A.D. 40, fearing that a decree would be passed requiring the emperor's statue to be placed in every synagogue, a deputation of Alexandrian Jews, including Philo, went to Italy. On arrival they learnt that the emperor had ordered Petronius, the governor of Syria, to place his statue in the Holy of Holies. Petronius fully realized the gravity of enforcing the order. He even, as a last resource, asked that it might be rescinded as impracticable. It was revoked, though reluctantly, as a favour to Herod Agrippa, but Petronius was ordered to commit suicide. Whether, had the emperor lived, he would have reverted to his original design is uncertain ; but Petronius and the Jews were saved by the

conspiracy to which he fell a victim in Jan. 41. The peril had been due to the diseased vanity of an insane emperor. Rome had protected the Jews in the exercise of their religion, which carried with it exemption from various duties imposed on other subjects, including military service. That they should be forced to submit to the erection of imperial images in their synagogues, or to the crowning abomination of a statue of Caligula in the Holy of Holies, no Roman statesman would ever have considered to be a matter worth a moment's consideration. It was notorious that the Jews, inflexible where their religion was concerned, would sacrifice their last ounce of treasure and their last drop of blood, rather than permit this unspeakable profanation. Nevertheless, the situation might recur with monotheists who did not enjoy the privileges accorded to the Jews.

Caligula was succeeded by Claudius on whose reign, but for two things, it would not be necessary for us to linger. Epiphanius apparently attributes the Apocalypse to this period (*Haer.* li. 12, 32), and John's banishment to Patmos has been connected with the famous statement of Suetonius (*Claudius*, 25) that this emperor banished the Jews from Rome owing to the disorders of which they were guilty at the instigation of Chrestus. Many interpret this as a confused account of Jewish riots in Rome occasioned by the propaganda of the Christians. Some have gone further and argued that the Jews



of whom Suetonius speaks were really Christians, and that a banishment of Christians from Rome was what actually took place. This imperial action was imitated in the provinces and John accordingly was banished from Ephesus to Patmos. This view would find very few if any defenders to-day (I am aware of none), but it has been defended by notable authorities in the past. Apart from this, it deserves mention as part of the evidence bearing on the question, when was the attention of the Roman authorities directed to the existence of Christianity in the capital?

This question becomes of much more interest when we pass to the reign of Nero. In A.D. 64 a terrible fire broke out in Rome.<sup>1</sup> It was very widely

<sup>1</sup> On the relations of the Church and the Empire there is an extensive literature. Of the older books it may suffice to mention Keim's *Rom und das Christentum*. The most important contribution on the legal aspects of the question is Mommsen's article, *Der Religions-frevel nach Römischen Recht* (*Historische Zeitschrift* vol. lxiv. pp. 389-429, 1890=*Gesammelte Schriften* vol. iii., *Juristische Schriften* vol. iii. pp. 389-422). Other recent discussions which may be selected for mention are Neumann, *Der Römische Staat und die allgemeine Kirche* (1890); Ramsay, *The Church in the Roman Empire* (1893); Hardy, *Christianity and the Roman Government* (1894, reissued in *Studies in Roman History: First Series*); Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*; Schmiedel, *Christian, Name of* in EBi; Henderson, *The Life and Principate of the Emperor Nero* (1903); Knopf, *Das Nachapostolische Zeitalter* (1905); Workman, *Persecution in the Early Church* (1906); Bury, *Persecutions of the Christians in the First and Second Centuries*, A.D. (Appendix in his edition of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* ii. 543-545). Hardy's discussion may be specially recommended. This marks a great advance on the treatment of the subject in his edition of Pliny's correspondence with Trajan (1889); his notes on the two famous letters 96 and

believed that Nero was directly responsible for it. Tacitus himself leaves the guilt of Nero an open question. All the later authorities roundly assert the emperor's guilt. The probabilities point strongly to his innocence, but the explanation that the fire was due to accident was too thin for an enraged and suspicious populace. Even those who took the more reasonable view were strongly inclined to see in the calamity a token that Nero had incurred the wrath of heaven. Not all his efforts to check the fire, the energetic measures he took to alleviate the miseries it had caused, the irreparable losses he himself had suffered by it, sufficed to still the voice of rumour, whether it gave tongue to honest credulity or malevolent invention. Accordingly the emperor looked about for scapegoats.

He found them in the Christians. Presumably the attention of the Government had been called to the existence of the sect by the riots in the reign of Claudius; though whether the authorities had

97, however, should be consulted (pp. 210-217). Wendland HRK<sup>2</sup> calls attention to a discussion by Heinze in *Berichte der Sächs. Gesch. der Wissenschaft*, LXII, which is inaccessible to me. It contests Mommsen's views, arguing that there were definite laws against Christianity and that on these the actions against the Christians in the provinces were based.

On the fire of Rome and Nero's persecution of the Christians, to the authorities just enumerated (especially Henderson) may be added Arnold, *Die Neronische Christenverfolgung* (1888); Klette, *Die Christenkatastrophe unter Nero* (1907; see Moffatt's review in *Hibbert Journal*, 1908, pp. 704-707); Furneaux *Annals of Tacitus*,<sup>2</sup> pp. 416-427 (care should be taken that it is the second, not the first, edition); G. C. Ramsay, *The Annals of Tacitus*, Books xi.-xvi. (1909).

realized that Christianity was more than a new Jewish sect is uncertain. By the time of the fire the populace was aware of the distinction. Already the Christians were the objects of popular hatred for the crimes and vices of which they were commonly believed to be guilty. Their unpopularity may have suggested their selection as substitutes for the emperor ; their anti-social habits made it easy to believe them guilty of arson on this stupendous scale. It is not indeed impossible, though perhaps hardly probable, that Nero himself took this view. Just as their language about the Lord's Supper lent colour to the charge of cannibalism, so their Second Adventist prophecies, their confident predictions of the approaching conflagration, may well have been misinterpreted as the language of incendiaries.

The course of events is somewhat difficult to follow. The language of Tacitus seems to mean that some Christians were confessing ("qui fatebantur"), and on the basis of this were denounced to the authorities ; but it is uncertain whether the confession they made was that they were Christians or were guilty of arson. The latter alternative is exposed to the objection that they should have owned to a crime of which they were in all probability innocent and from which, in the judgment of Tacitus, the legal investigation cleared them. It is of course possible that some Christians saw the beginning of the Divine judgment on Rome in the disaster which

had overtaken it, and that the unguarded expression they gave to their lurid anticipations of the wrath to come, may have been misunderstood by the heathen as admission of their own guilt. If the language of Tacitus implies that confession preceded arrest, and indeed led to their being denounced to the authorities, the more natural interpretation is that they were understood to admit that they had set Rome on fire. Yet the view that they confessed themselves Christians is also possible; and if the language of the historian could bear the meaning usually put upon it that the confession followed arrest, it would be the more natural interpretation. On information elicited from these the Government arrested an immense number of other Christians. They were put to death with tortures of the most exquisite kind, so that although the people regarded them as guilty of incendiarism and as deserving of extreme penalties for their other crimes and detestable habits, they came at last, keenly though they delighted in the horrors of the amphitheatre, and indifferent as they were to the pains of the victims, to feel compassion for those who suffered, less to satisfy the claims of justice than to glut the cruelty of the emperor.

The original charge broke down, yet the Christians were punished with death and death in its most gruesome forms. Why were they not acquitted and set free? Up to this point the Government had apparently taken little notice of the new sect.

Presumably it seemed to them insignificant in numbers and, as an offshoot of Judaism, to call for no new principles of treatment. But when the fire broke out, their responsibility for it had to be investigated. The enquiry convinced the authorities that they were innocent. But it also brought to light certain features of the new religion which seemed to justify its stern repression. In its very nature it was seen to be incompatible with the fixed principles of Roman policy and thus in itself to merit the extreme penalty. What view the police took of the current slanders is uncertain and immaterial. It was not for these alleged offences, incest and cannibalism, that the sect was placed beyond the pale; the religion itself was deemed unlawful and its profession worthy of death. This position appears so strange that we naturally ask why the mere profession of Christianity should seem a crime, especially when Judaism was tolerated. And the paradox is all the greater when we observe that the authorities did not put their own principles into practice with the thoroughness we should have anticipated.

Roman religion had been, as was customary in antiquity, a State religion, and its due observance was regarded as vital to the interests of the commonwealth. The well-being of the community depended on the favour of the Higher Powers; hence the most serious offence against society was transgression of the regulations for their worship or the failure to

pay them the honours or tributes they demanded. Refusal to render military service was far less serious, though Rome was a fighting State. For this simply withdrew the offender from the service of his country, whereas a violation of the sanctity of the gods might bring disaster upon the whole people. We must not forget that in antiquity religion was not normally regarded as a matter for individual choice. Everyone was born into a Divine-human community and a man could no more choose his religion than he could choose his family or his country. The deities of the State and the family were his deities, and it was the gravest impiety to neglect their worship or transfer his allegiance to alien gods. As time went on, there was much greater laxity than in the early period. But the authorities were likely to interfere if a religion appeared to have demoralising tendencies, or if its profession was incompatible with the practice of the national religion. In the case of a pagan religion this latter contingency did not arise, because it was not exclusive and its devotees could still continue to worship the Roman deities. And it was inevitable that, as the Roman empire grew, numerous cults should exist side by side in mutual tolerance. But monotheistic religions are necessarily exclusive; hence Judaism and Christianity were incompatible with Roman religion. Roman citizens could not practise them without risk, and anyone, though himself not a citizen, who attempted to make



proselytes of Roman citizens would render himself liable to punishment. This is not to say that action was regularly taken or penalties strictly enforced. The Jews were always difficult to deal with and the statesmanship of Rome avoided unnecessary collision with Jewish sentiment.

For a time Christianity was sheltered by its Jewish origin and connexion, and the Roman authorities protected its missionaries against Jewish attack, under the impression that they had before them simply a quarrel between Jewish factions. But even before the fire the people of Rome had realized the distinction between Jews and Christians, and the trial of the Christians after the fire left no room for doubt. Accordingly the Jewish origin of the sect now availed it nothing ; and its principles, clearly as incompatible with the State religion as Judaism itself, put it beyond the pale. Magic, child-murder, cannibalism, incest, might or might not be practised by it. Pliny's reference to crimes attaching to the name seems to suggest that the Christians were generally believed to be guilty of such moral enormities, though his investigation failed to detect that the belief had any foundation. But Christianity itself was clearly from the Roman standpoint a criminal offence which merited execution. Pliny, writing to Trajan early in the second century, reports that he thrice questioned those brought before him, asking simply whether they were Christians, and if in spite of

threats of punishment they thrice persevered in their confession, he ordered them to be led out to execution. Here there was no investigation as to whether they were guilty of other offences, Christianity was in itself a capital crime. In his reply Trajan approves Pliny's action. It is not quite certain when this attitude was first adopted by the Government, but intrinsic probability and the weight of expert opinion point strongly to the view that it was as early as the reign of Nero.<sup>1</sup> The investigations into the character of the sect revealed its intrinsic incompatibility with the fundamental principles of the State. The alternative view,<sup>2</sup> for which the evidence is very slender, is that under Nero the Christians were executed for their alleged crimes and that the profession of Christianity did not itself become criminal till the time of Vespasian or Titus.

It does not seem probable that any definite edict was pronounced, making Christianity an illegal religion and membership of the sect a capital crime. Such an edict was not necessary. Apparently the matter might be dealt with in two ways, it might be brought under the head of treason, either against

<sup>1</sup> So Mommsen, Hardy, Henderson and several others.

<sup>2</sup> Taken by Ramsay. See especially his defence of it in Exp. 4th series, vol. viii. (1893) against Mommsen's criticism in a letter to the Editor in the same volume. Mommsen's letter is of great importance, and should not be overlooked by any student of the subject, especially any to whom his article in the *Historische Zeitschrift* is inaccessible.

the gods of the Roman people or, and this was a still graver charge, against the emperor in his divine character. But this method, it would seem, was not that usually followed. It could also be dealt with as a matter for police administration. The magistrate had the right known as *coercitio* by which he could condemn to death any whom he regarded as dangerous to society. And probably it was through the exercise of the power thus vested in him that the Christian martyrs were normally condemned.

Thus to use Mommsen's famous phrase "the persecution of the Christians was a standing matter as was that of robbers" (PRE ii. 199). This makes it all the more surprising that the Christians were not hunted down and rooted out more systematically and thoroughly. They seem for the most part to have been let alone. Their position was always precarious, the sword of Damocles did not cease to hang over their heads ; yet persecution was intermittent and sporadic, and for long periods the Church enjoyed peace. An emperor might be hostile and an era of persecution set in, or the Governor of a province or a local magistrate might attack the Christians. If religious fanaticism, especially for the cult of the emperor, rose high at any time, the sacrifice of the Christians might be demanded by the mob ; or calamities might convince the populace that the gods were furious at the toleration of these "atheists," and as Tertullian

says, "if the Tiber rises to the walls or the Nile does not rise to the fields, if the sky is rainless, if there is an earthquake, a famine, a plague, immediately the cry arises, 'The Christians to the lion' " (*Apology* xl.). Or the "informers," either to satisfy private spite or for the sake of gain, might bring an accusation; and if the accused confessed himself to be a Christian the magistrate had to inflict the penalty. But normally the authorities were content to let matters rest, unless the mob forced their hand or the example was set by a higher power. This can only mean that they saw in the Christians no serious danger to the community. They were the victims of a detestable and incredibly foolish superstition, the tendency of their principles was anti-social, the charges of abominable practices might perhaps have some substance in them. But, for the most part, the authorities presumably regarded them as a handful of harmless fanatics whom it was best to leave alone. The policy of Trajan illuminates the whole attitude. While recognizing the criminal character of Christianity as a matter of course and fully endorsing Pliny's action, he nevertheless directs that the Christians are not to be sought out and that anonymous accusations are not to be entertained. If the charge is openly made and the accused persists in his confession he must of course take the consequences. Obviously if Trajan had considered the Christians a real menace to the community he could not have

given such directions ; he would have instructed Pliny that they must be hunted down and exterminated. Not unnaturally the Christians retorted that the attitude of the Government was illogical. But it was thoroughly characteristic of the opportunist policy of Rome, which was more careful to secure a smooth and successful administration than to maintain a logical consistency.

The reign of Nero was also memorable for the settlement of the long quarrel between Rome and Parthia. The trouble had centred about the possession of Armenia, and it was constantly breaking out afresh. Now Tiridates, the brother of Vologeses, king of Parthia, accepted from Nero as his suzerain the crown of Armenia. The peace thus made lasted half a century, till the reign of Trajan. Tiridates and Nero became fast friends, and on the news of Nero's death, Vologeses sent to Rome asking that the memory of Nero might be honoured. The personal attachment which Nero had inspired in the Parthian prince must be remembered if we are to account for the belief that he had escaped to Parthia.

It is a consoling reflection that tyranny contains within itself the seed of its destruction. Yet scant sympathy is due to the futile conspiracy of Piso which sprang from no love of freedom and plotted to replace one despot by another. Its detection led to an exhibition of poltroonery and mutual betrayal to which the fidelity of Epicharis, strained

to the uttermost by torture, stood out in radiant contrast, a freedwoman of slender reputation shaming the first families of Rome. The emperor's rule became a sanguinary reign of terror, no one in high position could feel safe from his fatal suspicion or jealousy. At last rebellion broke out in the provincial armies which had thus learnt the momentous secret that the emperor could be made elsewhere than in Rome (Tacitus, *History* I. iv.). The Senate decreed that Nero was a public enemy and condemned him to the cruel and ignominious execution appointed by ancient custom for such offenders. It was with the utmost difficulty and only under the urgent dread of an agonising and lingering death that he, who had doomed so many to suicide, at length had the resolution to attempt his own life, and only with the assistance of another did he succeed in effecting his escape.

Then followed "the year of the four emperors"<sup>1</sup> in which Galba fell a victim to Otho, Otho to Vitellius, and Vitellius to Vespasian. With the accession of Vespasian, the empire passed from the chaos and terror which followed Nero's death into a long period of rest and prosperity.

When Vespasian was put forward as emperor, he was engaged in the Jewish war. This had broken out in A.D. 66 about two years before the death of

<sup>1</sup> On this see Henderson, *Civil War and Rebellion in the Roman Empire*, and Hardy, *The Four Emperors' Year in Studies in Roman History: Second Series*.



Nero. For some time previously the relations between the Jews in Palestine and the Roman authorities were steadily going from bad to worse. The later procurators were for the most part corrupt, callous, and incompetent ; while on the Jewish side the control of affairs passed more and more into the hands of the fanatics and revolutionaries. The atrocious misgovernment of Gessius Florus precipitated the crisis. The revolt might have been quelled by Cestius Gallus, the Governor of Syria ; but he missed his opportunity, suffered a defeat, and the two peoples were definitely at war. Vespasian was placed in command by Nero. The Jews fought with great courage and tenacity, but Roman patience and discipline and military skill prevailed. The issue would have been more doubtful had the Jews been united. But they were split into factions, which tore each other with a ferocity surpassing even that which they showed towards Rome ; while their reckless and improvident destruction of the very necessities of life made their case more desperate. They were weakened by famine and pestilence, and the miseries of the people were intensified by the ruthless cruelties inflicted on them by the factions. Thus the story of the siege of Jerusalem is one of the most tragic and pitiful recorded by history. During the interval after the death of Nero the war was not prosecuted with vigour by Vespasian, and when he became emperor in the summer of 69 he entrusted the

conduct of the war to Titus his elder son. According to a Jewish oracle, still preserved in our Book (xi. 1f.), it was anticipated that the city and outer court of the Temple would be captured, but that the Temple and those who worshipped in it would be spared. But Christ's prediction that the Temple would be completely destroyed was fulfilled. The Christians had escaped, in obedience to His warning, from the doomed city and taken refuge in Pella on the East of the Jordan. The Temple was burnt in August A.D. 70, and shortly afterwards the whole city was in the hands of the Romans. The war dragged on for some time longer and came to an end with the capture of Masada in A.D. 73.

Vespasian was a shrewd man of affairs, an able administrator, with no touch of idealism. He did not take his divinity seriously, and in prospect of death made a jest of his approaching apotheosis. The reign of Titus was short. His reputation as a good emperor was rather cheaply won and had he lived he might, for all we know, have turned out as badly as Nero. Whether there was any persecution of the Christians under either of these emperors we do not know. Christianity being a criminal offence, such persecutions may have occurred. But it is improbable that either of them put forth his hands to trouble the Church. Domitian is reckoned in Christian tradition as the second persecutor, Nero being the first. The resemblance between Nero and Domitian naturally struck the Christians,

but it caught the attention of Pagans as well. They were alike in their administrative competence. Mommsen describes Domitian as "one of the most careful administrators who held the imperial office." Boissier's characterisation of him may perhaps be fitly quoted here, "He was not a madman like Caligula, nor a fool like Claudius. On certain sides he rather resembled Tiberius; like him he governed the empire well. He kept vigilant watch on the proconsuls and proprætors who administered the provinces, and beneath his sway the world was not unhappy. But, along with some good qualities, he had still more bad. The son of an economising emperor, simple, opposed to display and pomp, happy to recall his humble origins, he formed an absolute contrast with his father. He was intolerably vain and insolent; he took pleasure in humiliating those about him. Not only was he bent on the reality of power, but he delighted in its outward shows, even the most futile. He abolished the prudent measures by which Augustus had sought to dissimulate his sovereign authority that it might be accepted with the less repugnance. He had himself commonly called 'our Lord and our God, *Dominus ac Deus noster*.' In all things he aimed at being master and appearing so. Naturally all that seemed to surpass him gave him offence; he distrusted high-mindedness, talent and virtue."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Tacitus and Other Roman Studies*, pp. 34f.

Towards the close of his reign Domitian put to death his cousin Flavius Clemens and banished his wife Domitilla to an island. The charge was "atheism," by which Judaism or Christianity might be meant. It is almost certain that it was Christianity. At the same time many others were executed or banished or their property was confiscated. Christianity may indeed not have been the sole reason for this action. Tyrants are suspicious and Flavius Clemens stood near the throne.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Domitian showed some zeal for the revival of the national religion and exacted homage to his own divinity as no emperor before him had done save the insane Caligula. Probably, since the accused were of high position, they were charged with treason rather than dealt with by summary police measures. We know comparatively little of the details of this persecution. Lightfoot contrasts it several times with the Neronian persecution and the following passage may be taken as typical. "The Neronian persecution had been a wholesale onslaught of reckless fury. Domitian

<sup>1</sup> Cf. what Mommsen says (Exp. 4th series, viii. 6): "Be that as it may, Ramsay is wrong in regarding Vespasian as the true originator of the warfare against the Christian creed in itself; he was far too practical for such a crusade. Much better does it agree with the sombre but intelligent despotism of Domitianus; and the persecution attributed to him I think with Ramsay (p. 259) founded in fact, though the few details handed down to us point not so much to the abstract defence of the religion of the state as to the repression of Christian proselytism arriving at the ladies in court and the imperial family itself."

directed against the Christians a succession of sharp, sudden, partial assaults, striking down one here and one there from malice or jealousy or caprice, and harassing the Church with an agony of suspense. In the execution of his cousin, the consul, Flavius Clemens, the persecution culminated ; but he was only one, though the most conspicuous, of a large number who suffered for their faith."<sup>1</sup>

How far the persecutions in Rome affected Christians in the provinces we do not know. If the First Epistle of Peter was written, as many scholars believe, in this reign, we could use it as evidence on this point. But the relation between the empire and the Church reflected in it could quite well have existed thirty years earlier. The Apocalypse, however, probably belongs in its present form to the closing period of Domitian's reign and describes conditions as they existed in the province of Asia. Unfortunately the critical uncertainties make it difficult to use its evidence so freely as could be wished. It does not all spring from the same situation and some of its most striking

<sup>1</sup> *Clement of Rome* i. 81. See also pp. 351f. and ii. 17. On the general character of Domitian's tyranny cf. Boissier, *Tacitus and Other Roman Studies*, p. 34. "It is the property of tyrannical forms of government to grow steadily more exasperated. Victims summon victims. At the outset Domitian had only dealt his blows at intervals, allowing breathing spaces from time to time (*per intervalla et spiramenta temporum*): little by little the intervals crept closer and closer together, and condemnations ended by succeeding one another almost without pause."

references to martyrdom may originally have been occasioned by the suffering of Jews rather than of Christians at the hands of Rome. Yet these references are incorporated in the Christian Book and in some cases receive a definite Christian application. Moreover the special form which paganism assumes was one which affected the Christians far more than the Jews. There is a further difficulty in that we cannot be sure in some instances whether the reference is to events and conditions in the past or the present or whether it embodies anticipations of the future. So far as the evidence goes, however, it would seem as if a terrible persecution lay in the past, and this is most naturally explained of the persecution under Nero. The author anticipates a more terrible persecution still from which he expects that but few will escape. This persecution is connected with the worship of the Beast. The imperial power of Rome, concentrated in the emperor and represented by his image, is to be the object of adoration, and those who refuse to worship the Beast or to be tattooed with his mark must look forward to martyrdom. The one mode of execution mentioned is beheading (xx. 4).

It is possible that the demand for some act of worship of the emperor was introduced in Domitian's reign as a test for the detection of Christians. The Government could from its standpoint hardly rely on mere interrogation, since the accused might



escape by a false answer. Hence some method had to be devised, involving an act incompatible with Christianity, such as the demand for the adoration of pagan divinities or of the emperor or the cursing of Christ. Pliny employed such methods, in order that he might be assured in doubtful cases that he was not deceived by false denials prompted by fear.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### The Return of Nero.

IT is generally agreed that the Apocalypse anticipates the return of Nero. For us Nero has passed into a proverb for his cruelty and we find it difficult to believe that anyone could have regretted his downfall or seen anything but too gentle a retribution in his contemptible death. The despot whose worst atrocities were applauded by a servile Senate, the murderer whose assassination of his mother was the extreme instance of his ruthless disregard of the holiest ties and all the sanctities of life, the megalomaniac who set himself above all laws, human and Divine, and whose morbid vanity passed beyond all limits, the profligate who squandered on his pleasures the vast treasures of the empire and whose vices touched inconceivable depths of depravity, could not we imagine have left the scene where he had posed as the incomparable artist without leaving as his legacy a universal sense of relief. The reign of terror was at last over; the empire, stifled by the pressure of his hand, breathed freely once more. But to many

his overthrow and death were not welcome. His prodigality had not been felt by the common people as a burden; it had rather ministered to their pleasures. His depravities had not deeply shocked them, for detestable vice was only too prevalent and their moral sensibilities had been blunted by the example of his predecessors. His vulgar tastes and buffoonery made him popular and he had the instincts of a demagogue. The widespread belief that he had set Rome on fire made him the object of much resentment; but the memories of the populace are short and history shows us how easily men pass from extravagant execration to equally extravagant applause.

Moreover with Nero the Julian family had come to an end. That divine race of emperors, which from Julius Cæsar onwards had ruled the world with absolute dominion, had vanished. Men found it hard to accept either the three rulers of the interregnum or the Flavian line as of the true imperial stock. The impression made by the Julian emperors through a hundred years was so tremendous that it was difficult to credit its sudden extinction. Although Nero was positively known by some to be dead, yet the circumstances of his death were such as to leave room for suspicion that he was not dead after all. Trading on the popular belief, pretenders arose. In the reign of Galba a false Nero appeared, but he was captured on the island of Cythnus and executed. His body

was taken to Rome and there exhibited, to convince the people that his claim was false. More serious was the movement of Terentius Maximus, a musician of Asia Minor, who had the advantage of a remarkable resemblance to Nero. He collected adherents by the Euphrates in the last years of Vespasian and was assisted by the Parthians. Not improbably he is to be identified with the pretender who was subsequently surrendered by the Parthians to Domitian.<sup>1</sup> Early in the second century Dion Chrysostom says of Nero, "To the present time all men desire him to be alive and the majority even trust that he is."

Nero himself, we are told, believed, in consequence of predictions made to him, that he would be dethroned but would regain power and live till his seventy-third year, *i.e.*, till A.D. 110. In the Sibylline Oracles we have very distinct anticipations of his return. Unfortunately the critical problems are very complicated, analysis and date of the relevant passages being frequently uncertain.<sup>2</sup> In

<sup>1</sup> So Mommsen and Henderson. Lightfoot and Bousset leave the matter open.

<sup>2</sup> I cannot enter into these questions here. They are discussed by Zahn in Luthardt's *Zeitschrift* for 1886, *Apokalyptische Studien*; Geficklen, *Komposition und Entstehungszeit der Oracula Sibyllina*; and in some of the recent editions and translations. There are English translations of Books III.-V. by Lanchester (in Charles' *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha*) and Bate (in *Early Christian Documents*). Terry has a blank verse translation of the whole work. Blass translated Books III.-V. into German, with Introduction and Notes, in Kautzsch's *Die Apokryphen und Pseudepigraphen des Alten Testaments*. The best text of

what seem to be the earlier passages we have simply the anticipation of Nero's return. In later oracles his figure takes on more supernatural features and enters into combination with the figure of Antichrist. Similarly in the Ascension of Isaiah he is identified with Beliar.<sup>1</sup>

In the Book of Revelation we have apparently two representations. Nero is to return with the Parthians. This implies that he had not really died but had escaped to the East. The other representation is that he would return from the abyss. This implies that Nero had really died but would return from the underworld. It is difficult to attach any other meaning to the language. Nevertheless the presence of this second form of the expectation is denied by some scholars. And not unnaturally. For if the Book is a unity we can hardly expect these divergent forms to be recognized in it. Nor if we place the work before the destruction of Jerusalem can we reasonably believe that the anticipation of a return from hell could have arisen so soon. Moreover the existence of

the Greek is probably Geffcken's. Geffcken also contributes an Introduction and translation of Christian portions to Hennecke's *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen*. On the Nero-legend see Bousset's *Excursus* (*Off.J.* pp. 411ff.) ; Lightfoot, *Clement of Rome* ii. 511f. ; there are of course earlier discussions, e.g., in Renan's *L'Antechrist*. For an uncompromising attack on the whole theory see Benson pp. 159-177. It is really unfortunate that Benson's discussion is directed to the form in which the theory was presented by Renan and Farrar.

<sup>1</sup> See "The Antichrist, Beliar, and Neronic Myths and their Subsequent Fusion" in Charles' *Ascension of Isaiah* pp. li.-lxiii.

this belief is not attested independently of the Apocalypse till a later period than that to which the Book can with any propriety be assigned. In spite of these difficulties it would be illegitimate to infer that the Apocalypse contains no reference to this expectation. It would be an extraordinary principle of exegesis that the plain meaning of a Biblical passage should be set aside if no contemporary attestation of the belief could be cited. We should rather say that the Revelation contains the earliest reference in literature to a view which at a later period was widely diffused. Of course if the Book were a unity in the strictest sense, the acceptance of incompatible forms of the saga might plausibly be denied. Even then, however, the question would have to be raised how the passages were to be harmonised. We might either say that the author meant that Nero would lead the Parthians against Rome, and that the statement that he would come up out of the abyss was not to be literally taken ; or we might infer that he believed Nero to be dead but expected him to return from Hades and lead the Parthians against Rome. Against the former combination we might urge the violence it does to the language, against the latter the bizarre character of the combination. But in favour of the former would be its contact with history. For it can hardly be accidental that on the one hand the author expects a Parthian invasion and also an attack of Nero upon Rome, while we



know on the other hand that one false Nero (or possibly two) made trouble at the Euphrates and found support in Parthia. From this parallelism between our Book and contemporary history two inferences may be drawn. In the first place the Apocalypse does contain that form of the saga in which Nero was supposed to have escaped with his life and to have taken refuge with the Parthians. Secondly this renders the identification of the pseudo-Nero with the impostor executed on Cythnus in A.D. 69 highly improbable, and makes it practically certain that the Book cannot be earlier than the closing years of Vespasian.<sup>1</sup> In other words the former of the two representations must be recognized as actually present in the Book. But once we have accepted the view that the Apocalypse reflects different historical situations and remember that the second form of the expectation can be

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Henderson asserts against Mommsen that both pretenders anticipated help from Parthia (pp. 44of.). But the ground on which he does so seems to be untenable. He says: "*Cf. Tac. Hist. i. 2* for the earlier (as against Mommsen)." But I presume it will not be contested that in this summary reference to the pseudo-Nero Tacitus may be alluding to events recorded in the lost portion of the History, as is obviously the case with other allusions in this and the following chapter. When we turn to the account of the impostor who was killed on Cythnus (*Hist. ii. 8f.*), we find (*a*) that there is not the slightest reference to any relation with the Parthians, (*b*) that Tacitus promises to relate the career of other pretenders. When then he says in *i. 2* that the Parthian armies were nearly set in motion by the fraud of a false Nero, we may infer with confidence, that he is *not* alluding to the events narrated in the Second Book, but to a pseudo-Nero of a later period.

definitely proved to have existed, though at a later time, all reason for explaining away the explicit statement that the Beast would return from hell disappears. We can do full justice to both sets of passages and allow that the two stages of the expectation are represented in the Book.

But the criticism must be met that the belief that Nero would return from the realms of the dead could hardly have arisen so early as the reign of Domitian. It must be remembered that Nero was only a little over thirty at the time of his overthrow. Had he lived, he would have been less than sixty at the time of Domitian's death. In the course of nature then he might well have been expected to be still alive, all the more because of the prophecy that he would live till he was past seventy. Only when all reasonable probability that he was still alive had failed, could this form of the belief die out and be replaced by the wilder belief that he would return from the dead.

Viewed in the abstract and from a modern standpoint, this argument is not without force. But it is not really cogent. Legend is a quick growth and the credulity of a superstitious populace can work miraculous transformations. Even while pretenders were springing up and finding adherents, there was excellent evidence that Nero was dead; and as one movement after another came to nothing, and the real Nero never emerged from his imagined retreat, while the Parthians supported not the real

Nero at all but his counterfeit, it was only to be anticipated that the conviction that he had died at the time of his downfall would gain more and more credence. Yet the belief in his return did not fade ; it took on a more fantastic hue. The divinity of the Julian line was a firm conviction of multitudes, especially in the provinces. What would be incredible, if told of ordinary mortals, might easily happen in the case of a Cæsar. The impression made by Nero had been so tremendous that it was hard to realize that he had ceased to play his part in the world's affairs. But if he was to reappear and resume his place on the stage of history, it could only be through a return from death. Superstition was transforming him along other lines into a supernatural figure, as we see from the Ascension of Isaiah and the Sibylline Oracles. There was no need to wait till he could no longer be reasonably supposed to be alive. It is not necessary to suppose, because the new form of expectation finds its first expression in the Apocalypse, that the writer was himself responsible for the transformation. This may well have taken place in contemporary belief. Yet such a remoulding of the earlier idea would not be incredible. We have something similar in the development through which the forecast of a Parthian invasion itself passed. And in any case there is one feature in the representation of the Beast which might easily have suggested it. The author thinks of the Beast as the parody of Christ,

and it was therefore fitting that of him too it should be said, "He descended into hell."

We may then reconstruct, so far as it concerns us, the history of the belief in this way. Although Nero had actually died, the circumstances of his death, combined with the feeling that the Julian dynasty could not have perished nor such a figure as Nero have finally disappeared, to create the belief that he was not dead but in hiding. Taking advantage of this belief, impostors arose very soon after his death. As time wore on, the expectation passed into a second stage. This was connected with the appearance of Terentius Maximus in the closing years of Vespasian. The belief that Nero had not really died was still held, but he was thought to have escaped to Parthia and expected to return with the Parthians to overthrow Rome. When this, like other movements, came to nothing, and as time went on Nero still did not appear, the conviction grew that he had really died after all. Nevertheless the anticipation of his return remained at its full strength, and it was now believed that he would come back from the dead.

The most difficult question, however, still remains. The final stage of the development can hardly have been reached before the nineties, in other words it must be dated in the reign of Domitian at the earliest. Now the Antichrist is identified in Rev. xvii. 11 with the eighth king and he is said to be one of the seven. The eighth emperor was presum-

ably Domitian and the passage might quite naturally be taken to mean that Domitian was the Antichrist. In favour of this it may be urged that Juvenal described Domitian as "a bald Nero" and that Tertullian, at a later date, compared him with Nero for his cruelty. And it might be argued that if Jesus could find the prophecy of the return of Elijah fulfilled in John the Baptist, the anticipation of the return of Nero might be regarded as realized in Domitian. Moreover it was especially in Domitian that the recognition of the divinity of the Emperor reached its climax. The worship of the Beast, that is of the Roman Emperor, is the point on which the main emphasis rests; here is the crucial issue between the Empire and the Church. Domitian was beyond all others conspicuous for the rigour with which he insisted on his divinity and demanded that divine honours should be paid to him. All this tallies remarkably with the situation which gave rise to the Apocalypse in its present form.

But this identification is exposed to the gravest difficulties. We have not the slightest evidence that Domitian was ever identified with the returning Nero; and indeed how could he be? At the time of Nero's death Domitian was nearly grown up and he had been in the public eye almost ever since. He might be looked upon as a second Nero; literally identified with Nero himself he could not be. The parallel with the coming of Elijah in the

person of John the Baptist is only specious, for Jesus certainly did not mean that Elijah had come back from heaven and been reincarnate as John the Baptist. But the language of the Apocalypse is plain, that the eighth king had literally reigned before, had for a time been dead, and would come up out of the abyss once more to reign. It would seem then that the identification of the eighth emperor with Domitian should be given up. At this point, however, it may be better to break off this discussion, referring to the examination of the prophecy of the beast with the seven heads (pp. 80-90, 348-353).

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### The Art of the Book.

NO one can read the Apocalypse with sympathy and insight without realizing that it exhibits some of the qualities of great literature. But the modern discussions of its unity and the sources from which it has been derived have not been without effect on the appreciation of its artistic merits. Just as the unity of the vocabulary and style has been felt to be a serious objection to theories of composite origin, so the artistic structure of the Book has seemed to tell against the theory of compilation from unrelated sources. Thus Marcus Dods says on this point : " It is difficult to consider with patience theories which propose to allot to different authors various portions of a book than which there is in all literature, none more obviously a carefully designed and artistic whole. Literary criticism must count for nothing if such a book is composed of fragments casually accumulating through successive generations " (INT p. 246). This judgment has real force against such theories of composition as Völter's. But it is less relevant

against the hypothesis that the Book has a real author but that he has incorporated earlier material in it. For such a view recognizes a real unity in the Book and emphasizes in its own way the point to which Dr. Dods called attention. Yet it does more justice to those features which the analytic investigations have brought to light. Its advocates are not tempted to ignore the evidence of incongruities, differences in standpoint, discontinuities, which are really present in the Book. Accordingly they approach the consideration of its alleged artistic structure with more reserve than was usual with the older scholars. All the evidence of deliberate plan and architectural skill they are prepared to welcome but they are under less temptation to turn a blind eye towards indications which tell in the other direction.

Evidence of design seems to lie on the surface. In the body of the Book the reader is at once struck by the three series of seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls, and to these corresponds the series of seven letters. Scholars have also discovered a sevenfold division of the Book. Milton's noble passage will be familiar to many readers: "And the Apocalypse of St. John is the majestic image of a high and stately tragedy, shutting up and intermingling her solemn scenes and acts with a sevenfold chorus of hallelujahs and harping symphonies: and this my opinion the grave authority of Pareus, commenting on that

book, is sufficient to confirm.”<sup>1</sup> But all such theories seem to involve undue forcing of the facts into a ready-made mould.

When we consider the structure more in detail we begin to question whether it is so symmetrical after all. The scheme proceeds with fair regularity to the sounding of the seventh trumpet. We have a prologue, the vision of the glorified Christ and His letters to the seven Churches, then the vision of God in heaven followed by the scene of the Lamb and the book. This naturally leads on to the breaking of the seals. The first six seals are broken, then there is an interlude and following that the breaking of the seventh seal. Similarly in the case of the trumpets between the sounding of the sixth and the seventh there is another interlude as in the case of the seals. But then the arrangement becomes perplexing. The third series of plagues does not follow on the seventh trumpet as the second series had followed on the seventh seal, but three chapters are interpolated (xii.-xiv.). We can account fairly well for the introduction of xii. and xiii., though it is not so clear that they could not have come as well at an earlier point. But xiv. impresses the reader as rather miscellaneous in its contents and as less necessary to the action of the Book. It is difficult to suppress the feeling that the scheme of the Book has been strained by

<sup>1</sup> *The Reasons of Church Government Urged against Prelaty : Second Book,*

the insertion of these chapters. And it is significant in this connexion that the interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpets contains the incident of the angel and the little book. The seer receives new materials for his composition ; he is explicitly told that he must prophesy again over many peoples and nations and tongues and kings. Room has to be made for fresh matter, and while one can only be thankful that the matter was included, we ought probably to recognize that symmetry has been somewhat sacrificed to it. The third series of seven bowls largely repeats what we have already met with in the seven trumpets, but here again the writer departs from the method adopted for the seals and the trumpets. For they fall clearly into two divisions, consisting of the first four and the last three, and there is an interlude between the sixth and the seventh. Neither of these features is present in the case of the bowls. On the remaining chapters it is not necessary to dwell, they give a narrative in chronological order with repetition, but otherwise we cannot speak of structure in the sense in which we apply the term to the earlier sections.

We have already illustrated the importance attached to numbers, and no student of the Book can fail to be struck by the large part they play in it. In particular we have three and four ; seven, the sum of three and four, and twelve, their product when multiplied together. We have three and a

half, the half of seven. In addition to the actual mention of the figures, their use can often be detected in other ways. The author is fond of enumerations by threes, fours and sevens. Enumerations by sixes may really consist of three pairs. Examples of the use of these and other numbers need not be quoted. Effective use is made of parallelism and contrast. Thus the dragon, the Beast and the false prophet form a contrast to the Father, the Son and the Spirit. The dragon is the head of the kingdom of evil, as the Father is supreme in the kingdom of God. The Beast is the agent of the dragon receiving his power from him. A death-stroke has been inflicted on him, he descended into hell, he will rise again from the dead, he will have a Parousia and reign on earth. The Son similarly receives all from the Father, He too has been dead and is alive again, He will have a Parousia and an earthly reign. The false prophet glorifies the Beast and deludes mankind into worshipping him. The Spirit is in this Book primarily the inspirer of the true prophets, who testify to Jesus and present Him as worthy of Divine adoration. If the devotees of the Beast bear his mark on their forehead, so too do the worshippers of Christ bear His name. The horror of the great supper of God, with the birds for His guests and His enemies for the banquet on which they feed, is contrasted with the blessedness of the marriage supper of the Lamb. So Babylon is contrasted with the New Jerusalem and the

Harlot with the Bride. Scenes of blessedness and judgment are also put over against each other; and in particular one of the finest features in the Book is that scenes of great distress and terror are often relieved by scenes of felicity and rest. Thus between the appalling sixth seal and the opening of the series of trumpets we have the picture of the innumerable multitude before the throne. After the chapters on the dragon, the Beast and the false prophet and the terrible persecution they portend, we see the Lamb on Mount Zion attended by the hundred and forty-four thousand ascetics who follow Him whithersoever He goeth. And between the dreadful carnage, when the harvest of the earth is reaped and its vintage is gathered, and the pouring out of the seven bowls, which is the climax of judgment, we see the conquerors standing by the glassy sea and hear them sing the song of Moses and the Lamb.

We have just touched on one of those features in the Book which enrich its art while they heighten its devotional value, and that is the inclusion of hymns sung in heaven, some of them of great beauty and sublimity. Mr. J. K. Mozley says: "They are of the nature of commentary upon the developing facts, and while we ourselves are looking to those facts for a message of encouragement and inspiration, for the teaching of patience and the confirming of our hope, we may turn aside to see how the realities of the heavenly world and the



earthly drama present themselves to these watchers on the heights.”<sup>1</sup>

The artistic value of the Book is greatly enhanced by its eminent literary qualities. Every reader will realize in a measure its beauty and force of expression. That the language is often irregular and ungrammatical is true, though for the English reader this is no disadvantage since its solecisms disappear in translation. But the literary power of the Book must strike every reader who is sensitive to style. It is rich in pithy and striking phrases or sentences, many of which have passed into our current religious speech. Illustrations of this are the following: “But I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love.” “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life.” “And they shall walk with me in white; for they are worthy.” “Hold fast that which thou hast that no one take thy crown.” “Behold, I stand at the door and knock.” “The kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ.” “They sing as it were a new song.” “These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.” “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord.” “Blessed are they which are bidden to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” “King of kings and Lord of lords.” “Behold, I make all things new.” “I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.” “The leaves

<sup>1</sup> *The Christian Hope in the Apocalypse*, pp. 68f.

of the tree were for the healing of the nations.” “His servants shall do him service; and they shall see his face.” “I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright, the morning star.” “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And he that heareth, let him say, Come. And he that is athirst, let him come: he that will, let him take the water of life freely.”

The reader is constantly struck by the extent to which the author draws on the Old Testament. But he weaves its phrases together skilfully so as to give a fresh and effective impression. He makes no quotations of the ordinary type, but he borrows much of his phraseology from it. This has constantly to be remembered when we are appraising his literary skill or when we are accounting for the choice of his language. Thus “his voice was as the sound of many waters” is not only remarkably fine and effective both in itself and in its context, but the choice of that metaphor was, we are apt to think, suggested by the thunder of the surf on the beach of Patmos. Really, however, it is taken straight from Ezekiel, who speaking of God says: “and his voice was like the sound of many waters: and the earth shined with his glory” (Ezek. xliii. 2). The second clause of the description is used in Rev. xviii. 1.

The Book is less rich in metaphors than one would have anticipated, and several of these are drawn from the Old Testament. The author's

metaphors are almost entirely of things seen or heard. The voices are as of a trumpet or as a voice of thunder, or as a lion roaring, or as of many waters. The sound of the demon locusts' wings is as the sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to war. Glass or precious stone, and especially crystal, are his standards of clearness and brightness. He that sits on the throne is like a jasper stone or a sardius, and the light of the New Jerusalem is compared to that of jasper. The appearance of the glorified Christ is described by the seer in language borrowed from Daniel's description of the Ancient of Days. His head and hair were white as white wool or as snow, His eyes like flame of fire, His feet like burnished brass refined in a furnace, His countenance as the sun shining in its strength. Similarly the face of the angel with the little book is likened to the sun. When the great earthquake takes place, at the opening of the sixth seal, the sun becomes black as sackcloth of hair and the moon like blood, while the stars fall to the earth as the fig-tree casts her unripe figs when it is shaken by a great wind. The New Jerusalem is made ready as a bride prepared for her husband.

The author's love for the gigantic and stupendous is obvious to every reader. Nearly all the voices in the book are great voices. His angels excel in strength. The earth is dark with the smoke of the pit when it is unlocked by the star. And similarly it is lit with the dazzling radiance of one of his angels.

He has a Homeric delight in full-sounding phrases, especially in his enumerations. "And the kings of the earth, and the princes, and the chief captains, and the rich, and the strong, and every bondman and freeman, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains." Or again, "Amen : blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever."

He has great descriptive power. We may take as examples of this the description of God enthroned and surrounded by the living creatures and the elders, or the innumerable multitude before the throne, or the angel with the little book, or the angel with the millstone, or the great white throne, or the New Jerusalem. The literary power with which the opening of the first four seals is described must strike every susceptible reader. The pregnant brevity of the expression, the vivid realization of the scene by the author, and the communication of his own apprehension to us, make this passage among the most attractive in the Book.

As an example of his skill in grouping his material we may take the vision of Him that sits upon the throne. This is not part of the action of the Book, but it is fitting that it should be placed where it is, before the action begins. The living creatures chant the holiness and eternity of God, while the four and twenty elders ascribe to Him the glory, the honour, and the power, since of His own

sovereign will all things were created. Thus as we pass on to the turmoil of history and watch the forces of evil unchained, while the ordered universe sinks back into chaos, and famine and pestilence press hard on the heels of war, we remember, in the moments when the powers of darkness seem triumphant, that above the confusion and the terror of earth God reigns in His heaven, the Creator and Lord of the world, the Omnipotent whose might knows no limit, the Eternal who is touched by no change or decay.

And if looking at the Book as a whole we enquire how it has been affected by the inclusion of foreign matter our verdict must be that the writer remains an author and not a mere compiler. He has subdued his material to his own purpose, worked it into his design, expressed it in his own way. The general uniformity of the style is best explained on the view that we have to do with a work proceeding in its present form from a single author, who was on the whole successful in welding into a relative unity matter drawn from various sources both literary and traditional. The artistic structure of the Book which investigation soon discloses, and in which minuter study will detect a somewhat elaborate design, also attests the real unity of authorship. No theory that disconnected documents have been simply pieced together can satisfy the conditions of the problem. That the author has fully triumphed over all the difficulties of his

task, has attained perfect symmetry in structure, unbroken by discordant elements, has obliterated all divergences in ideas, would indeed be too much to claim. But if he does not rank with the supreme artists, the men of serene and lucid vision before whose imagination the structure rises, perfect in its balance and proportion, lovely and beautiful in its form, majestic in its mass, warm and radiant with its own fire and light, he was at least a writer of genius, masterful in the handling of his materials, forcing them, though with some violence, into his scheme, gifted with a fancy brilliant, though at times too gorgeous or even bizarre, mighty and rugged in speech.

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## CHAPTER IX.

### Principles of Interpretation.

**I**T is remarkable that expositors of the Apocalypse have been at variance even on the first principles of interpretation. Some regard it as entirely predictive of the last times, with the exception of the first three chapters, though some do not except even these. These advocates of the "futurist" theory suppose that the events which the author describes still lie in the future. Others imagine that the writer sketches the development of history from the first century to the end. If we can rightly match historical events of the past with their apocalyptic symbols, and correctly interpret the chronology of the Book, we can calculate our own present position in the series and so forecast the future and construct a prophetic almanac. Others again, the præterist interpreters, believe that the Book is entirely preoccupied with the situation as it existed when it was written and with the chain of events that was to grow directly out of it. Finally there are expositors who renounce the futurist, the continuous-historical and the præterist theories, contending that there is no chronological develop-

ment in the Book or description of future events, but that the various scenes simply express in apocalyptic form great spiritual truths, reveal the forces which are at work in history and the principles which control its development.

I begin with the continuous-historical theory which has been extremely popular for centuries and especially with Protestant expositors, who found in the Book a whole arsenal of weapons against the Papacy. It has been held by men of great learning and piety, whose arguments have evidenced considerable knowledge of history combined with great ingenuity in the application of apocalyptic symbols. I need refer only to Bengel, whose scheme was adopted by John Wesley, to Mr. Elliott the learned author of *Horæ Apocalypticæ*, to Professor Birks, and to Dr. Grattan Guinness. In spite however of the unmeasured confidence which some of its advocates display, this theory is exposed to serious objections, some of which apply also to the futurist interpretation.

I place in the forefront a general consideration based on the nature of prophecy and apocalyptic. Both types of literature spring directly out of the contemporary situation and are adjusted to it. The prophet speaks to his own generation and is concerned with its urgent problems. He rebukes the sins and follies of his contemporaries. When he speaks of the future it is to give warning of judgment at hand or to comfort the despondent

or despairing with tidings of a brilliant and blessed sunrise after the night of thick darkness and storm. And similarly an apocalyptist is concerned, not with the centuries which are to follow the publication of his work, but with the need of his own time, and he too addresses his own contemporaries, speaking the fitting word to their condition. If it may seem that the eye of the seer ranges forward for many generations and sees the events in succession down to a distant future it is only in appearance that this is so. For the ages are those which lie between the assumed and the real standpoint of the writer, and what he gives out as prediction is really only history related in the future tense. We have no parallel in Jewish apocalypses to what is claimed for the Book of Revelation unless we identify their assumed with their real standpoint. For the uncanonical apocalypses this will hardly be asserted, even though a New Testament writer attributes to Enoch himself a prophecy in the book which goes by his name. For the Book of Daniel the claim will no doubt be made that he does predict in extensive and minute detail a whole series of events in a somewhat remote future. Accordingly the unprecedented character of the Revelation on the continuous-historical interpretation will not be admitted by those who accept the traditional date of Daniel. But those who are convinced of its Maccabean origin must allow that there is no parallel to the procedure attributed to our author.

There are objections, however, not so limited in their appeal which appear to be conclusive.

Of what value to the first Christians would this enigmatic sketch of events lying far ahead of their time have been? Dr. Milligan well says, "The first generation of Christians could have attached no proper meaning to the establishment of Christianity under Constantine, to the rise of Mohammedanism, to the accoutrements of Turkish Pashas, to the varying fortunes of the Lutheran Reformation, to the seven Dutch united provinces, or to the French Revolution."<sup>1</sup> With equal justice he insists that the Book would have been useless to the great body of the Christian Church even after the events had been fulfilled and the fulfilment recognized. Only to a few is the privilege granted to know even in outline the story which the author is said to have foreshadowed. If for example we take one of the best known and ablest representatives of this school we find that Elliott's voluminous work draws for its identification of fulfilments to a very large extent on Gibbon's "Decline and Fall."<sup>2</sup> For ordinary Christians a book that requires

<sup>1</sup> *Lectures*<sup>3</sup> p. 130.

<sup>2</sup> See i. 115f. for his characterization of Gibbon and enumeration of his eminent qualifications, directed by an overruling Providence to the same period and nearly the same subject as the larger half of the Apocalyptic prophecy. He adds: "Thus was the infidel Gibbon prepared to become unconsciously the best illustrator of no small part of the prophecy: that self-same heavenly prophecy that he has himself made the subject of a sneer."

for its interpretation such minute historical knowledge of a little known period can be of little service.

Nor are the events selected as fulfilments always those of capital importance. Milligan describes them as "not unfrequently of the most puerile and trifling kind." He adds: "One is pained to speak in this connexion of the red stockings of Romish Cardinals, of the horsetails borne as symbols of authority by Turkish Pashas, or of Sir Robert Peel's motion, in 1841, of want of confidence in the Whig ministers."<sup>1</sup> He points out further that the events are chosen for the most part from Western Christendom, little notice being taken of the Eastern Church. Moreover some things which were among the most momentous in Western history, which could hardly indeed have been left out had the writer contemplated what is attributed to him, are omitted, such as the discovery of America, the invention of printing, the division of the Church into such numerous and warring sections. "Nothing is said of the Reformation in Bohemia or France or Spain, or of its disastrous retrogression in these lands after having made in them a start so full of promise."<sup>2</sup> Elliott can see one of the three unclean spirits like frogs in democratic radicalism, as exemplified in the Reform Bill of 1831, and another in the Tractarian movement;<sup>3</sup> and leaves us wondering

<sup>1</sup> *Lectures* p. 133.

<sup>2</sup> *Lectures* p. 132.

<sup>3</sup> *iv.* 29-34, 46-62.

how political and theological antipathies can guide his quest, while events on the cosmic scale are left out of account. And such fulfilments as are discovered are not infrequently reached by illegitimate and violent exegesis.

Everyone who has gone even a little way in the study of this method must be struck by the constant divergence in the results reached by its different advocates. Elliott, whose confidence in his own scheme is unbounded, calls emphatic and repeated attention to its originality and the defects of other interpreters of his own school. It may suffice, however, on this to quote the pungent criticism of Godet: "How can we feel any confidence in this method of interpretation when we see, for instance, one and the same vision—that of the locusts with the tail of a scorpion (ix.)—interpreted by some of the Arabian invasion in the seventh century; by others of the incursion of the Persians under Chosroës; by a third party, of the introduction of the Talmud among the Jews; and by others again, of the establishment of monasticism? Is not the arbitrariness which gives birth to such a method of interpretation most glaring? and can we help asking ourselves what object the Holy Spirit could have had in view, in writing, according to the malicious expression of M. Réville, "a history of the Church in riddles"? If this vision is intended to serve as a guide to the caravan during its march, must it not be made more intelligible? If it is not to



be understood until the end comes, and when the goal shall have been reached, of what use will it be then ? ”<sup>1</sup>

Another feature of importance is the principle of calculation. It is vital to this scheme, since a period of 1,800 years more or less has to be covered. It is obvious that the notes of time in the Book cannot on this interpretation be taken in their literal sense. We have accordingly a year-day principle of measurement.<sup>2</sup> In other words a day in the Revelation must be taken as equivalent to a year. This makes it easy to provide for more than two-thirds of the required time at a stroke. There is a period constantly recurring in the Book, variously stated as 1,260 days, 42 months, or three and a half years. On the principle mentioned this period is taken to be 1,260 years, and with correct determination of its starting point the right point of its termination can be calculated with certainty, providing that the precise length of year can be ascertained. But it is the validity of the principle which needs to be established and for this the evidence is wholly unsatisfactory. In proof of this

<sup>1</sup> p. 358.

<sup>2</sup> In defence of this principle see Elliott<sup>3</sup> iii. 221-250, iv. 520f. ; Birks, *First Elements of Sacred Prophecy ; Thoughts on the Times and Seasons of Sacred Prophecy* ; Grattan Guinness, *The Approaching End of the Age* summarising Birks. On the other side see S. R. Maitland. *An Enquiry into the 1260 Years*, also *A Second Enquiry* with other pamphlets enumerated by Elliott iii. p. 222 ; S. Davidson INT<sup>1</sup> iii. 510-538. This discussion is not included in Davidson's later editions.

principle its advocates allege the forty years of wandering in the wilderness corresponding to the forty days occupied by the spies in searching the land, each day for a year (Num. xiv. 34) ; Ezekiel's lying on his left side three hundred and ninety days and forty days on his right side, typifying the iniquity of Israel and Judah respectively, again each day for a year (Ezek. iv. 4-6) ; and the satisfactory results which the principle has yielded in its application. It is not possible to examine at any length the passages alleged in proof, but no such principle can be legitimately derived from them. In each of the two cases there is a comparison between two periods in the proportion of the length of a day to the length of a year. But the two terms are not identical. The spies spend forty literal days in their search and the term means "day" and nothing else. Ezekiel lies so many days on his side, but here again the word "day" means "day," not year. In the symbolism of the action the day in the experience of the individual represents a year in the life of the nation. But it is in no sense identical with it. We may compare the scale of a map where an inch might represent twenty miles, but no one supposes that the inch is anything but a literal inch. Now this very element of comparison which is of the very essence of the case quoted in illustration is absent in the apocalyptic measurements of time. Elliott says, "A precedent more clear and complete than this could scarce be

desired ; as a *probable* key and guide to the meaning of the *days* in the symbolic visions that we have under consideration ” (iii. p. 227). This seems quite unwarrantable, for not only is the element of comparison wanting, but that out of the very numerous instances in which numbers are employed in Scripture these two should be selected as indicating the true interpretation of apocalyptic numbers is most arbitrary. Where the scale of a day to the year is employed, it is explicitly stated. Here there is no statement of the kind, nor even any hint that anything but the literal sense is intended. The author does not introduce his time measurement with such a phrase as “ Here is wisdom,” that he may hint to the attentive reader that some mystery lies beneath his apparently matter of fact statement ; and unless we have very clear warrant for imposing another than the plain sense on the words we must allow that plain sense to stand. Besides, even if it be granted that a day stands for some other period of time, we should have still more Scriptural warrant for supposing it to represent a thousand years, in accordance with the principle laid down in 2 Peter iii. 8. For here at least the author is dealing with eschatology, with the very problem as to the delay in the Second Coming, and that in a Christian writing, be it observed, and one not so far removed from the date at which the Revelation was published. It may be added that this interpretation of the 1,260 days has no support in early tradition or

opinion. The defenders of the theory are forced to admit this, and advocate the strange theory that men's minds were providentially restrained from hitting upon the truth "so long as it would have necessarily involved a conviction of Christ's Advent being an event very distant."<sup>1</sup>

It is true that the general line of interpretation which we are discussing is not inseparably bound up with the year-day theory. Bengel for example, though one of its most eminent and influential exponents, rejected that theory. But in the calculations the scheme of a year to a day has been and still is very prominent. Whether it be included or not, however, the whole type of interpretation is gravely compromised not merely by the extensive disagreements between its advocates, but still more by the repeated failures of the attempts to construct a prophetic almanac. Bengel by elaborate calculation fixed on 1836 for the imprisonment of Satan. Elliott, freely admitting the miscalculations of his predecessors, believed that he had so secured himself against error by establishing converging lines of independent evidence all pointing to the same conclusion, as to determine the position which had been reached when his book was written, and to fix "the year 1865, or thereabouts, as the proper epoch of the consummation" (iv. p. 255). Undaunted by disillusion, unwarned by failure,

<sup>1</sup> Elliott iii. p. 239. Similarly Birks, *First Elements of Sacred Prophecy*, p. 311.

our own time still sees the calculators busy at work, their futile labours to receive at the hands of history their inexorable rebuke. It is still fresh in my memory how I heard one of the most prominent exponents fix the date of the Second Coming April 11th, 1901, at three o'clock in the afternoon (N.B.—Jerusalem time!); and how with amusement I watched him wriggling forward to new positions as the preliminary events failed to make their punctual appearance, first, if my memory serves me rightly to 1908, subsequently to the early twenties. All this was before the great European War; and certainly it is not surprising that this appalling catastrophe should have greatly encouraged our modern soothsayers.

What really seems fatal to this method of interpretation is the explicit language of the Book itself. Language can hardly express in a more definite or emphatic way the imminence of the events which are predicted. It is this which constitutes the urgency of the author's message. Alike at the opening and close of the Book the message is repeated, "The time is at hand," "behold I come quickly," and the contents of the book are described as "the things which must shortly come to pass." Daniel was bidden seal his prophecy because the end was not yet, though less than four centuries would intervene between prediction and fulfilment. Is it credible that John should be directed not to seal up the words of the prophecy since the

time was at hand, if more than 1,800 years were to intervene between the prophecy of the end and the end itself?

This last consideration is also fatal to the futurist interpretation.<sup>1</sup> This is not so vulnerable to the refutations of history as the continuous-historical, nor are its advocates so inevitably doomed to disappointment. For by transporting everything to the time of the end, they are released from the necessity of ransacking history for fulfilments already reached and constructing a calendar of events still in the future from the data gained by their study of the past. When the drama begins it will speedily end. The first signs of its coming may be detected by the watchful, but there can be no long suspense till all is made plain. But while the continuous-historical interpretation does this measure of scanty justice to the express statements of the Book as to the speedy fulfilment of what is announced, that it does at least take into account the writer's present situation and the immediate future, the futurist scheme does them no justice at

<sup>1</sup> Among futurists may be mentioned S. R. Maitland, Todd, J. N. Darby, W. Kelly (*Lectures on the Book of Revelation*), Sir Robert Anderson (*The Coming Prince*), Pember (*The Great Prophecies*), Kliefoth, and Zahn. The originator of this method was the Jesuit Ribeira (A.D. 1590); it was designed to meet the continuous-historical interpretation with its identification of the Beast with the Papacy. A similar interest enlisted Tractarian sympathy for the futurist scheme, which was defended by Newman in *Tracts for the Times*. The rival scheme has often been known as the "Protestant" interpretation.



all. It has indeed been argued by some that the whole Book including the seven letters deals with the last times, and in that case the standpoint of the author and similarly the date from which the brief interval before the end begins may itself be placed in the distant future. It is argued that i. 10 should be explained, "I was in the Spirit at the day of the Lord," that is the author in a trance condition was present at the consummation and saw the whole of the last things enacted before his eyes. This interpretation is probably to be set aside (see p. 220); but apart from this the view that the letters themselves are directed to a far distant future is simply incredible. No one save in the interests of a theory, would imagine that the letters had any other destination than the churches to which they were addressed, or contemplated any conditions save those which prevailed in them at the time.<sup>1</sup> It would be less extravagant to argue that the revelation proper, which begins with the opening of the seals, depicted the events of a far distant time; yet this also contradicts the

<sup>1</sup> Some futurists take the letters to be addressed to the actual churches existing at the time, but also to represent seven successive stages of the universal Church in which the particular types of the seven churches would be successively embodied. This interesting combination of a continuous-historical interpretation for the letters, with a futurist interpretation of the great prophecies may be seen in Kelly's *Lectures* and Pember's *The Great Prophecies*. Kelly calls attention to a passage in Mede's *Short Observations on the Apocalypse*, Works, p. 905, in which the same view of the seven letters is taken. Mede belonged to the "Protestant" school.

explicit language already used, that the Revelation embraces the things which must shortly come to pass and places the Second Advent in the near future. It would also be unparalleled if a prophecy stood so completely out of relation to the age and conditions in which it was uttered. On this it is unnecessary to repeat what has been already said. Moreover the Book would on this supposition be almost entirely useless to the Church in its pilgrimage through the centuries.

Of the three traditional schemes then we are left with the præterist. This has several conspicuous advantages. It answers to the general custom of prophet and apocalyptist to be pre-occupied with the conditions of their own time and the issues which flowed out of it. It does ample justice to the declarations of the Book itself and to the imminence of the crisis. The sketch of the conditions and the writer's anticipations of the future correspond very well with contemporary conditions and expectations, especially if we make allowance for the use of traditional material in our estimate of such features as do not seem to have been suggested by the circumstances of the time.

One form of præterist theory which I cannot accept deserves mention here because it combines fidelity to the distinct affirmations of the Book that the time was at hand with the belief that the consummation predicted actually occurred and that the Second Coming took place as foretold.

This is the view developed with considerable skill by Dr. J. Stuart Russell in *The Parousia*.<sup>1</sup> The author is concerned with the New Testament evidence in general, but nearly a third of his comprehensive work is devoted to the Apocalypse. Dr. Russell insists that the consentient witness of the New Testament affirms in the strongest way that the Second Coming would take place within the first generation. This prediction, so emphatic and so repeated, cannot have missed its fulfilment. It is associated with other events and particularly with the Destruction of Jerusalem. The Revelation is accordingly taken to describe the course of events which culminated in the overthrow of the Holy City.<sup>2</sup> This, however, "was not a mere thrilling incident in the drama of history" but an unparalleled event—"the close of one dispensation and the commencement of another" (p. 546). But this fulfilment was not limited to what can be observed, it was associated with other fulfilments in the region of the spiritual and invisible, the coming of

<sup>1</sup> It was published, without the author's name, in 1878. Its method is to examine one by one the New Testament passages which bear on the subject. This has the disadvantage that a systematic statement and defence has to be put together from scattered material, the Summary and Conclusion not adequately providing it. Those who wish to see a compact systematic treatment of the subject may find it in *The Christ has Come*, by E. Hampden-Cook.

<sup>2</sup> Russell argues very elaborately for the identification of Jerusalem with the Babylon of the Apocalypse (pp. 484-497). This is natural in view of his general theory, and the cosmic significance he attaches to its destruction.

the Son of Man, the complete manifestation of the Kingdom of God, the resurrection of the dead and the Judgment. Of these events, which are not open to verification by the senses, we are assured by the authority of Christ and inspired apostles, and their reality is guaranteed by the exact fulfilment of those predictions which related to the visible and material order. If that side of the prophecy which can be tested is authenticated by history, the other side which is inseparably connected with it receives its ample guarantee. While I am unable to accept this view, I admire the author's courage in drawing his conclusions and the consistency with which he has applied his principles; and I cannot but think that exponents both of the continuous-historical and the futurist schemes would find a wholesome corrective in Dr. Russell's work. Indeed, if we were limited to the choice, I am by no means sure that his view would not have the best claims to acceptance.

It is, however, hampered with serious difficulties. It rests on an axiom and an induction neither of which can pass unchallenged. The axiom is that the predictions cannot fail to be fulfilled. When the book was published, now more than forty years ago, a theory of Scripture was dominant amongst us for which that axiom was unquestioned. But I need not labour the point that the situation has greatly changed. It has for some time been increasingly recognized that while the early Church confidently expected the Second Coming to take

place within the first generation, that expectation was not fulfilled. And even those who admit the axiom of infallibility will escape from the conclusion by some device of interpretation.

We come then to the inductive evidence by which one half of the prophecy is found accurate and thus the other half is guaranteed. If Mr. Elliott finds his material very largely in Gibbon, Dr. Russell draws his from the historian of the Jewish war. He says, "Without undue presumption it may be claimed for the scheme of interpretation advocated in these pages that it is marked by extreme simplicity, by agreement with historical facts, and by exact correspondence with symbols. There is no wresting of Scripture, no perversion or accommodation of history, no manipulation of facts. The only indispensable *apparatus criticus* is Josephus and the Greek Grammar" (p. 535).

The ingenuity of the author in detecting parallels between Josephus and the Apocalypse is undeniable, and the advocates of the continuous-historical method might do well to compare their own favoured brand of that theory not simply with other brands but with Dr. Russell's set of correspondences. They may learn from it that solutions about which they are confident may be matched by solutions no less plausible.

The fundamental objection which will be felt by many is the intrinsic incredibility of the theory. By this I do not mean that the events are incredible

in themselves, but that if they had taken place it is incredible that the Church should have had no record of them. It is of course tantalising that the history of primitive Christianity after the close of the Acts of the Apostles should be so largely unknown to us. But that the Second Coming with all its accompaniments should have taken place, and the Church have lost all consciousness and preserved no record of it, is difficult to believe. It has for long been a familiar saying that Church History passes at this time through a tunnel, but this is not due to the violent dislocation in its development which this theory postulates. Waiving all question as to what may have happened in the unseen world, there are certain incidents which are transacted in the visible order. The return of Jesus is to be as visible as His Ascension had been. He returns with the clouds of heaven and attended by angels. Every eye is to see Him and in particular those who pierced Him, while all the tribes of the earth, or at least of the land, wail because of Him (Rev. i. 7). Believers in Christ are to be caught up to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. iv. 17). They are to undergo a transformation by which the corruptible body should put on incorruption and the mortal immortality (1 Cor. xv. 52-54). This, be it observed, is not limited to the Churches in Palestine; it is to Churches in Greece that these promises are made and they are matched by similar promises in letters addressed to other Churches.



Now if this prophecy was fulfilled in A.D. 70 we ask in bewilderment how the Church on earth continued to exist at all ; and further since there was no breach of continuity in Pagan communities how the sudden disappearance of Christians from the world excited no remark. And in particular, seeing that there was demonstrably a Christian Church in existence and planted in several centres in various countries by the end of the first century, we inquire how it was that these Churches came into existence and why they were so completely unaware that the Second Coming had actually taken place. It is suggested that comparatively few may have been involved. No wonder, it is said, need be felt if in Palestine when the country was in a state of chaos the watchful Christians disappeared ; while in the Gentile world the number of the Christians at the time was not great and of these a relatively small proportion may have been watching for the coming of the Bridegroom. But the more the difficulty of unmarked disappearance is alleviated by the reduction of numbers affected, the greater becomes the difficulty created by the increase in the number of survivors, who would naturally have preserved the knowledge that Christ had actually come, and that the expectation of His waiting followers had been fulfilled. It is even suggested that the unwatchful Christians, who remained on earth to carry on the Church, did preserve the record and that later ecclesiastics suppressed it ! The intrinsic

difficulties which the theory creates and the desperate hypotheses to which it gives rise will probably always prevent any wide acceptance of it.

But there are other objections. In the first place all New Testament documents which speak of the Second Coming as still in the future have to be placed before A.D. 70. This is probably much too early a date for some of these books, at least for 1 John and 2 Peter, and while the Fourth Gospel is dated later, its complete failure to recognize that the promise had been fulfilled creates a serious problem. That the Apocalypse must be earlier than the destruction of Jerusalem is obviously a necessary inference from the theory, and here there is a considerable body of critical opinion in support. But those who believe that the Book as it stands is more than twenty years later will naturally feel this as an additional objection. Nor, in spite of the immense amelioration of conditions created by Christianity, is it easy to credit that in A.D. 70 Satan was bound for a thousand years.

We are left then with the præterist interpretation in its usual form. The writer is dealing with the situation as it existed in his own day and as he expected it to develop, but the Second Coming did not take place as the primitive Church anticipated. It is superfluous at this point to discuss what that situation was, since the question is examined in detail elsewhere in this book.

It is necessary, however, to touch upon an objection which is regarded by some scholars as fatal. This is that inasmuch as on the præterist interpretation the predictions of the Book were not fulfilled, it is unaccountable, if this hypothesis is correct, that a Book so discredited should have been held in such estimation from the first and found a permanent place in the New Testament Canon. This objection has been stated with his usual skill by Salmon in his discussion of the date, and it is obviously plausible. At the time Salmon's argument was published the earlier date was almost universally accepted by præterist interpreters, and in the form in which the theory was stated it was certainly open to grave objections. It is to be regretted that Salmon and Benson argue against it in the form most brilliantly expounded by Renan in his *L'Antechrist*, which Farrar did most to popularise on this side of the Channel. This statement of it was exposed to serious difficulties. In particular these scholars credited the writer with the belief that Nero would return from Parthia. I entirely agree that in the reign of Galba the author could not have expected that Nero would escape to Parthia and come back to take vengeance on Rome, for the pretender who was captured in Cythnos had no connexion with Parthia, and it was only a number of years later, so far as we know, though Salmon seems to exaggerate when he says "full twenty years" (INT<sup>4</sup> p. 245), that Parthia

adopted the cause of a pseudo-Nero.<sup>1</sup> Moreover Salmon is right, in principle at any rate, when he argues that we have no occasion to accumulate details from the career of Nero "with the view of showing how applicable the title of wild beast was to that monster," since no explanation of the imagery is required beyond the fact that it was derived from the Book of Daniel. It might perhaps be more correctly said that it was derived from the apocalyptic tradition in general; but the warning is sound that we must not press for correspondences in contemporary history to details which are demonstrably to be found in earlier literature.

Moreover I have not a little sympathy with Salmon's reply to the contention that the prophecy was really, though not literally fulfilled, since while things did not turn out as the seer anticipated, his predictions received their real fulfilment "in the barbarian overthrow of the Roman Empire, and the establishment of modern Christendom." The excuse that principles rather than details are alone important, since "mere soothsaying is not the intention of prophecy," seems justly open to Salmon's retort. He says: "Now I feel myself safe in saying that the view is quite modern which regards prophecy as a kind of sacred song of which

<sup>1</sup> See the discussion of this point on pp. 96f., 125, 128. I might add that Salmon's objections would be modified at some points if the reign of Vespasian were substituted for that of Galba, while the Book was still held to be earlier than the Destruction of Jerusalem. But the main argument would be unaffected.

the melody only need be attended to, the words to which the air is set being quite unimportant" (INT<sup>4</sup> p. 250).

I do not, however, agree that the failure of the writer's anticipations would necessarily discredit his work. The parallel drawn by Salmon (p. 247) with the discredit that would have overtaken any French prophet who in Christmas, 1870, predicted that Paris would be partly taken and a third of the city burnt, but that the other German nations would rise against the Prussians and destroy Berlin, is quite inexact. For apocalyptic does not deal in such plain unvarnished language, and is therefore susceptible of reinterpretation in quite another degree. There is an illustration of this in the Book itself. The obvious meaning of Rev. xi. 1f. is that while Jerusalem is to be trodden underfoot by the Gentiles, the Temple will be preserved. But this did not prevent the author of the Book from including it, though at the time the Temple had been in ruins for more than twenty years. Similarly the natural line to take, when the writer's forecasts had apparently not been justified, was not to cast the Book aside, but to say we must have been mistaken in our interpretation of it. Such has in fact been the constant resource of the continuous-historical interpreters when their confident forecasts have been belied by the event. And the vagueness of the apocalyptic style made such an expedient quite legitimate. Not indeed that the writer,

practised a studied vagueness or safeguarded himself by a deliberate ambiguity. But he conformed to the tradition of oracular and mysterious utterance, not because he was playing for safety, nor even necessarily because he was not clear in his own mind as to the meaning of his prophecy. We must indeed allow for the latter possibility, and it is by no means unlikely that, where he was operating with traditional material or recording what he had seen or heard in ecstasy, he may have written down what he himself but dimly understood. Yet in the main he probably had a definite plan of the future in his mind. But the form which convention offered him permitted an elasticity of application far beyond what he realized. Had he said in so many words "the Temple of Jerusalem will be saved from the Romans" or "Nero did not really die but has escaped to the Parthians and, marching at their head, will attack Rome and burn it to the ground," or "Nero did die but will come back from hell and lead a vast host of demon warriors against Rome from the Euphrates," then there would have been a true parallel with Salmon's *reductio ad absurdum*, our author matching the hypothetical French prophet predicting the destruction of Berlin by Germans in 1870. But these things the writer does not say; and the fact that there is still room for debate among præterists as to the application of his symbols, proves that the words he used did not irretrievably commit him to one particular



scheme of events. Some modern scholars of the front rank firmly believe that the measuring of the Temple and its worshippers was described after the destruction of Jerusalem had taken place, and did not imply that the Temple would be spared when the city was destroyed. Others again question entirely, and not without plausibility, whether the myth of the returning Nero is present in the Book at all. The enumeration of the kings may be adjusted to various sets of identifications. The indications of time are not sufficiently definite to fix the points at which details in the prophecy are to receive their fulfilment. So far am I from believing that on the præterist hypothesis the course of history must have rapidly given the lie to the Book, that I do not believe the writer himself would have felt his forecast to have been discredited by the event. He too might well have said that his own anticipations of the future based upon his vision had been falsified, but that this was due to his failure to understand the vision aright. We must never forget in interpreting the Book that, however much study and thought had contributed to its making, it is not a purely literary production. Ecstasy, vision, audition played a large part in its creation. We, as students of prophetic psychology, may analyse the material of his visions and discover the contribution drawn from prophecy or apocalypse or apocalyptic tradition. But we must clearly realize that the seer does not go behind the vision and ask

himself what earlier knowledge has been combined and worked up in it. He realizes it as a Divinely given insight into the future, and in good faith reports it as he has experienced it. Hence he will not be troubled if the event proves other than he had anticipated. For him the vision itself is the fixed starting-point, a revelation of the future which he cannot doubt. And if the course of events moves on lines he had not expected, it was his inference from the vision, not the vision itself, which was at fault.

And it is not the Apocalypse alone to which Salmon's argument could be applied. Why should we argue that if the præterist interpretation were correct the Apocalypse would have been promptly disowned by history and scouted by the Church, if we do not see an insuperable difficulty in the acceptance of the Gospels caused by the presence in them of predictions which were apparently unfulfilled? If all things predicted in the eschatological discourse were to come to pass in that generation, if the disciples were not to have gone over the cities of Israel before the Son of Man had come, if among those who listened to His words there were some standing by who were not to taste of death till the Kingdom of God came with power, might we not as plausibly argue that documents containing these promises were discredited by the event, as press a similar inference with respect to the Apocalypse? And if in the one case the Church

was assured that history had not given the lie to Him who spoke the words or to the Gospels in which they were recorded, we need find no greater difficulty in assuming a similar attitude towards the Book of Revelation.

It remains to speak of another line of interpretation of which the foremost advocate in Great Britain was the late Dr. Milligan. It has also been expounded by Archbishop Benson and the treatment of the Book by Godet has affinities with it. It breaks away completely from the view, common to all three methods which have been discussed, that the Apocalypse is concerned with specific events and periods, and regards it as an exposition of principles. A few quotations from Dr. Milligan will suffice to indicate the standpoint adopted. "While the Apocalypse thus embraces the whole period of the Christian dispensation, it sets before us within this period the action of great principles and not special incidents" (*Lectures* p. 153). "In the respect now mentioned the Apocalypse resembles all true prophecy which, whether in the Old Testament or the New, contains mainly the enunciation of great principles of God's government of men, and not the prediction of special events. Even when the latter are predicted it is generally less for their own sake than for the principles they illustrate" (p. 154). "Thus, then we are not to look in the Apocalypse for special events, but for an exhibition of the principles which govern the history both of the

world and the Church" (p. 155). "The book is regarded throughout as taking no note of time whatsoever, except in so far as there is a necessary beginning, and at the same time an end, of the action with which it is occupied. All the symbols are treated as symbolical of principles rather than of events; and that, though it is at once admitted that some particular event, whether always discoverable or not, lies at the bottom of each. All the numbers of the book are to be regarded also as symbolical" (SPC p. 367). How far Dr. Milligan was prepared to push his principles will be clear from a further quotation. "The fundamental principle to be kept clearly and resolutely in view is this, that the thousand years express no period of time. Like so many other expressions of the Apocalypse, their real is different from their apparent meaning. They are not to be taken literally. They embody an idea; and that idea, whether applied to the subjugation of Satan or the triumph of the saints, is the idea of *completeness*. Satan is bound for a thousand years—*i.e.*, he is completely bound. The saints reign for a thousand years—*i.e.*, they are introduced into a state of perfect and glorious victory" (*Lectures* p. 211).

It is not strange, when we consider the difficulties which the Apocalypse presents, if an escape from them along these lines should have been welcomed. And whatever opinion we form of the interpretation itself, we cannot withhold our admiration

from the skill with which it is presented and the profound study of the Book displayed in its exposition. But whatever be the difficulties of the Book, the case is assuredly not so desperate as to force us to this way of escape. In the first place the fact that the author has chosen to present his message in the form of an apocalypse must be allowed its full weight in determining our view of his aim. With every allowance for the differences which separate the Revelation from other books of its class, it is yet the case that the Apocalypse starts from a concrete historical situation and grapples with the problems it presents. Principles of course may be definitely enunciated in it, and certainly they will be applied ; but the aim of the writer is not to expound a philosophy of history in the first instance, but to show how, in the light of the philosophy that is held, the past is to be judged, the present to be interpreted, the future to be foretold. We approach the Revelation with the anticipation that in this respect the Book will conform to type. It is with events, with personalities, with periods that we expect to find it concerned. And this is what we actually find if the plain meaning of the text is to be our guide. Symbols no doubt there are, but they are symbols of historical conditions accomplished or anticipated.

In the next place it is difficult to believe that, had his aim been what is stated, the writer would have taken this way to attain it. It would have been

far simpler and have answered his purpose far better if the principles he desired to enforce had been plainly expressed. As it is, the writer has conveyed the impression that his primary concern was to disclose the secrets of the future, to trace beforehand the course of history. And this is indeed the avowed intention of the Book. The Revelation unveils "the things which must shortly come to pass" (i. 1). It is "the things which shall come to pass hereafter" (i. 19) which Jesus commands him to write in his Book, and which when he is bidden to enter heaven, he is promised will be shown to him (iv. 1). And at the close of the Revelation the same note is struck (xxii. 6, 10). We are not justified in substituting for the definite incidents exhibited in historical sequence, however this may be interpreted, the principles which animate the history. In particular the indications of time can hardly be intended to stand for anything but definite chronological periods. The question whether the author means precisely a thousand years may be answered in different ways. That he does not think of a chronological period at all, but uses the phrase simply to express completeness, is really beyond belief.

It is also hard to credit that a writer who desired to set forth in vivid and picturesque imagery the principles which dominated history should have produced just this kind of book. It is far too complex and elaborate for the purpose, and the



attempt to distil the precious spiritual and moral essence, with which alone he is thought to have been concerned, leads to very arbitrary interpretations. And it is not as if these principles had not already been disclosed in Scripture. The author has been very unsuccessful if the aim attributed to him is the real one, since a long interval has elapsed before his real purpose has come to light.

There is another serious difficulty of interpretation created by the relation between the different parts of the Book. We seem more than once to be brought to the close of the development, but are surprised to find that the action takes a fresh start and new visions follow. This has been frequently explained by a theory of recapitulation.<sup>1</sup> The three series of visions, the seals, the trumpets and the bowls are thought to traverse the same ground but in different ways, each of them taking us down to the end. The obvious similarity between the three cycles, especially the second and third, lends a plausibility

<sup>1</sup> This theory was put forward by Victorinus of Petau, who was martyred about A.D. 303, and played a very important part in the later interpretation of the Book. It is rejected by continuous-historical expositors. Milligan could not adopt the view in the form that the three sets of visions covered the same series of *events*, but he says "the different visions of the book do not follow one another in such a manner that each takes up the thread of a continuous history where the one before it ends. Each of the three groups, in particular, of the Seals, the Trumpets, and the Bowls, starts from the beginning of the Church's fortunes upon earth, and takes us by its own path to their close." (*Lectures* p. 101.)

to this mode of interpretation and undoubtedly the obvious suggestion of the sixth seal is that the day of doom has actually arrived. Similarly the vision of the harvest and vintage of the earth taken in itself is most naturally interpreted of the final judgment. Yet as the Book is at present arranged, the opening of the sixth seal comes almost at the beginning of the prophecy proper, and after the harvest and vintage of the earth we have the whole series of the seven bowls. It is also strange that after the seals and the trumpets, the measuring of the Temple, and the story of the witnesses, we should have the birth of the Messiah.<sup>1</sup> On the whole, however, it seems more probable that the author intends the Book in its present form to exhibit a progressive development, rather than a mere repetition. And perhaps those are right who regard the seven trumpets as contained in the seventh seal and the seven bowls as contained in the seventh trumpet.<sup>2</sup> But the real reason for the

<sup>1</sup> Observe further that although the Beast does not arise from the deep till the thirteenth chapter, it is represented as making war on the two witnesses in the eleventh. Alford (iv. 256) perhaps goes too far in regarding this introduction of the Beast by anticipation as fatal to the continuous-historical interpretation; but it tells against it.

<sup>2</sup> A. B. Davidson, who rejected the recapitulation theory as "very improbable," illustrated the view which he accepted; that "the seventh seal develops into the seven trumpets" and the seventh trumpet into the seven bowls, by a telescope in three sections, which when closed represents the seven seals. If a section is drawn out, that represents the seven trumpets; and then the third section when drawn out of this in its turn

arrangement which appears so strange is probably to be found in the stages through which the Book has gone. The author has not worked with an entirely free hand, he has drawn not a little on older material, and incongruities have been created by this combination of elements from different sources. Hence it is not unlikely that sections which in their original form served one purpose are made by their present arrangement to serve another. The praise which has been lavished on the artistic arrangement of the Book is not indeed wholly unmerited, but art has again and again been subordinated to other interests.

There is another question on which something must be said and that is the symbolism of the Book. My main concern is to utter an emphatic caution against pressing the symbolism too far. The Apocalypse is no doubt often obscure and its language is often allegorical. But it has to be interpreted in its plain sense far more frequently than many expositors are willing to admit. Much

represents the seven bowls (*Waiting upon God* pp. 354f.). Stuart Russell uses the illustration of a telescope in a different way: "If we may venture to use such an illustration we should say that the visions are not *telescopic*, looking at the distance; but *kaleidoscopic*—every turn of the instrument producing a new combination of images, exquisitely beautiful and gorgeous, while the elements which compose the picture remain substantially the same" (p. 378). This would suit a recapitulation theory, but on p. 407 he says, "We think the whole vision of the trumpets forms part of the catastrophe under the sixth seal" (N.B.—not the *seventh*).

is written in simple characters which expositors have insisted on treating as hieroglyphics. In particular natural phenomena have been interpreted of historical events and the author has been credited with describing a political movement when he has been really speaking of God's judgments through nature.<sup>1</sup> And the temptation has been especially great to find allegories where the author describes things in a matter of fact way, when the descriptions are bizarre and uncongenial to modern taste. The interpretation of the Bible has suffered much from modernising, from that treatment which will not let the writers mean what

<sup>1</sup> On this question the student should consult the weighty protest by A. B. Davidson in his *Old Testament Prophecy* pp. 171-176. He is referring to prophecy in general, but he explicitly affirms that the same principle "must be applied also to the interpretation of the Apocalypse" (p. 172). It is most regrettable that Swete in the application of his eclectic method of exegesis should have countenanced this allegorical exposition of natural phenomena. Thus the earthquakes of the sixth seal are racial and social revolutions which herald the approach of the end (p. 90), while the eclipses and occultations of the heavenly bodies "seem to represent the decay of society, such a period of collapse as followed the ruin of the Empire, and may yet be in store for civilization" (p. 91). Or again: "As to the general sense, the locusts of the Abyss may be the memories of the past brought home at times of Divine visitation; they hurt by recalling forgotten sins" (p. 116). The earthquake of xi. 13 "seems to indicate the breaking up of the old pagan life which would follow the foreseen victory of the faith" (p. 138). On the casting of the dragon out of heaven, he says, "the extraordinary progress of the Gospel and the Church during the first three decades and a half that followed the Ascension may well be the earthly counterpart of Satan's fall" (p. 151).

they say but insists on making them mean something much more in harmony with modern thought, sentiment, and taste. And this has specially to be borne in mind when the Revelation is in question, for here the temptation to misinterpretation is very great.

The Apocalyptist shared to the full the view of the universe current in his time, behind which there stood the tradition of many thousands of years. It was, of course, a Ptolemaic view. Above the flat earth stretched the solid sky not far away, and through a doorway in it one might enter into heaven, where was the throne of God supported by the four cherubim, while on their thrones before it sat the four and twenty elders. There was stored the heavenly Jerusalem waiting till the time had come for it to descend upon earth. There, too, was the Temple of God wherein was the Ark of the Covenant that held the hidden manna, the altar whereon the incense was offered that made the prayers of the saints so powerful with God, that altar beneath which the souls of the martyrs are in repose and utter their impatient cry that God will avenge their blood. Around the throne there are the multitudinous angels "ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands" who sing the glories of the Lamb. And with them is joined the innumerable multitude of those arrayed in white robes who have come through the great tribulation, who do priestly service in God's Temple, sheltered by His

gracious shadow and led by the Lamb to the waters of life.

And just as heaven is on the other side of the firmament which is not so far away, so the abyss also is below the surface of the earth. Earth and the underworld are connected by a shaft, the mouth of which is closed with a cover which is locked or sealed. When it is opened, a dense smoke pours into the upper world; and the writer describes how from the clouds of smoke, which darken the sun and the air, the demon locusts emerged, led by Abaddon the angel of the abyss to inflict with their stings intolerable torments on mankind. And into the abyss, through that shaft, the fettered Satan is cast and made secure by the sealing of its cover. There too perhaps was to be found the lake of fire that burned with brimstone.

Now these descriptions of heaven and hell were meant by the author to be very literally taken. They are not figures of speech; and if we are to be true to the writer's thought we can scarcely represent the scenes to our imagination with too much realism. And similarly the scorpion locusts are quite literally intended; they are not heretics, or Goths, or Mohammedans, or the mendicant orders, or the Jesuits, or Protestants, or Saracens or Turks, but they are uncanny denizens of the abyss, locusts of a hellish species, animated by devilish instincts and equipped with infernal powers. And similarly the demon horses with lions' heads, breathing fire and



smoke and brimstone, with tails like serpents, ridden by two hundred million horsemen, are neither horses of this world nor to be figuratively explained of human armies. It would be most natural, in view of the references to the Parthians and the mention of the Euphrates, to suppose that the dreaded Parthian invasion of the Empire was here intended; but the vast numbers and the description of the horses show us clearly that some more awful visitation is in view, and the relation between the demon cavalry and the cavalry of Parthia is similar to that between the swarms of locusts that ravage the crops and those locusts of hell whose prey is men.

So too with natural phenomena. For us the rolling up of heaven like a scroll, from whose crumpled surface the stars are loosened and fall to the earth, has no meaning. But for the ancients who thought of the stars as luminous points attached to the sky, on which they moved in their appointed tracks, summoned from their concealment at sundown and returning to their retreat at dawn, such a description had no difficulties, and its realization in some tremendous convulsion of Nature would in no wise seem strange. Thus when we read the magnificent description at the close of the sixth chapter of the appalling earthquake, with the sun black as sackcloth and the moon crimson like blood, the sky rolled together and the stars falling to the earth, and every mountain and island uprooted

from its place, we must not suppose that the earthquake stands for a political convulsion, or that the fall of the stars represents the downfall of kings. Nor once more when the huge mountain-like mass, all flaming, is hurled into the sea, are we to suppose that the mountain stands for a kingdom. Nor when we read that the star called Wormwood fell on the rivers and fountains are we to imagine that the star is a symbol of heresy or that the author is thinking of Attila, the scourge of God. In all these cases and in many another the writer means exactly what he says, neither more nor less nor yet something entirely different.

Yet the writer has his symbols. Thus the riders who appear at the opening of the first four seals are symbols; the interpretation of the first is uncertain, but the rest represent War, Famine and Pestilence. The Beast stands for the imperial power of Rome, its seven heads are seven kings. The Scarlet Woman is the city of Rome. But these symbols are either so described as to be quite transparent or they are definitely interpreted for us. In other cases an element of symbolism may enter into a description which is not in the main to be symbolically interpreted. Thus when the author describes the New Jerusalem he presumably means a real city, though of celestial origin and unearthly wealth and splendour. It is a real dwelling-place for men, but when he says in the measurements he gives for it "the length and the breadth and the height thereof

are equal," it is certainly difficult to suppose that he thought of this city as twelve thousand furlongs high, though it is quite true that the extravagance of Oriental fancy leaves the sober Western imagination far behind. But this feature recalls the Holy of Holies which was a perfect cube and may be the writer's way of expressing in symbols the truth which in its literal form is that the Tabernacle of God is with men. And if it is urged that this grudging admission of symbolism really surrenders the principle that is here asserted, the reply is not so easy as one could wish.<sup>1</sup> I can only state my firm conviction that to treat the Apocalypse as a book in hieroglyphics is a profound mistake; that our modern canons of taste and fitness must not be applied to determine what the author can or cannot have meant; that in the main we must take him to mean just what he says, though it may seem to us extravagant or bizarre; that we must never lose sight of the difference between his conception of the structure, the properties, the possibilities of the universe and our own; that we must never be tempted to reduce his anticipations to the limits of our own experience; that we must eschew the translation of his glowing and gorgeous descriptions into frigid allusions to distant historical events or into spiritual and moral commonplaces. If these

<sup>1</sup> In the discussion of the passage (pp. 364f.) I have suggested that the reference to the height may not belong to the original text.

principles are not to be inflexibly applied, at least they should dominate the exegesis, and any departure from them ought to be made with caution. In individual cases much will depend on the interpreter's exegetical tact ; but the example of Bengel may serve to remind us that, where the fundamental principles are false, neither piercing spiritual insight nor exegetical skill will be of much avail to the interpreter of this Book.

Nor would it be fair to retort that this is to treat the Apocalypse with a prosaic literalism and prove oneself lacking in sympathetic appreciation of poetry. So might the allegorists have argued who turned the rich full-blooded realism of Homer into the thin and pale abstractions of the Neo-platonic philosophy.

## CHAPTER X.

### The Teaching of the Book.

SOME of our foremost authorities on New Testament Theology, such as Holtzmann and Feine, warn us that no theology of the Book can be constructed. And it is true that the process by which it came into existence has left such marks upon the teaching that their warning is not without justification. At the same time in view of the relative unity of the Book in its present form and the rich and interesting material which it contains, it may serve a useful purpose if this material is collected and classified.

As is natural in a Book dominated by the conflict of Christianity with Paganism and called into existence by the Imperial demand for the most flagrant idolatry, the monotheism common to Jew and to Christian receives the greatest prominence. Over against the fleeting race of Cæsars it sets the Eternal God, Him who is and was and is to come, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the King of the ages, who liveth for ever and ever. In contrast to the weak mortal who claims

divine honours, it sets the strong God, the Lord God, the Almighty, Lord of the earth and God of heaven. If Cæsar sits on the throne of Babylon and seems to hold the destinies of the world in his hands, it is God who has created the universe and sits on His throne in Heaven, it is He who controls history and holds the Book of Destiny on His hand. While the whole world is the victim of delusion and worships the dragon, pays idolatrous homage to the Beast and wonders at the miracle of its recovery from the death-stroke and return from the abyss to our upper world, the four living creatures rest not day or night praising their Omnipotent Lord, while the four and twenty elders fall prostrate before Him and sing in His honour the Song of Creation. Nor do they stand alone, for to Him the innumerable angels pay their tribute of adoration and every created thing throughout the vast spaces of the universe joins in their praise. When the seer would worship the angel who reveals and interprets the mysteries of the future to him, he is sternly rebuked and told that his worship belongs to God alone.

But it is not only these metaphysical attributes which inspire the praise of His creatures. He inhabits eternity, from Him the universe and all beings in it derive their origin, He governs the world and directs history to its goal; but the deepest spring of His creatures' praise is to be found in His moral and spiritual qualities. He is



the thrice Holy One, in truth He alone is holy ; righteous and true are all His ways and judgments. It is indeed on the judgments which have fallen on His enemies and the oppressors of His people that the author most constantly dwells. Plague after plague smites an apostate and impenitent world, the wine of His wrath is prepared unmixed in the goblet of His anger, His enemies are trodden like grapes in the winepress of His fury, and finally in the last series of plagues the vials of His displeasure are poured out to the dregs. Especially on the imperial city and on the Beast are His judgments executed and the blood of His servants is avenged. When the waters are turned to blood the angel of the waters acknowledges His righteousness ; “ they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and blood hast thou given them to drink.” Yet while the author emphasizes the sternness of His retribution and the fierceness of His vengeance, he is not unmindful of the more gracious aspects of His nature and His acts. He enters into tender relations with His people, He makes them kings and priests, He becomes their God and makes them His sons. They serve Him day and night in His Temple, they live with Him in blessed immortality, sorrow is for ever ended, sickness and death afflict them no more.

At present all power seems to belong to the monster who is enthroned at Rome and the nations say, “ Who is like unto the beast ? and who is able

to war with him ? ” But the God whom he blasphemes, whose throne he usurps and whose inalienable honours he claims, waits for His manifestation till the appointed hour has come. He waits, but is not inactive. Hidden from the eyes of men but in full view of the heavenly host and of the seer, to whom for the sake of His people the invisible world has been opened, He is setting those mighty forces at work which will bring the godless empire crashing to the dust. Then He will take His great power and reign amid the hallelujahs of the angels and the redeemed. Then at the final consummation the New Jerusalem will descend from Heaven, and God will make all things new. His tabernacle will be with men, He will dwell with them and they shall be His peoples and He will be their God.

While the doctrine of God in the New Testament and especially in the Apocalypse moves largely on Old Testament and Jewish lines, this is not the case, nor indeed could it be, with its Christology. The early Christian doctrine touching the Person of Jesus is naturally a development of Jewish Messianic theology, as we find it in the Old Testament and in the later pre-Christian period. But it was not merely such. It may be seriously questioned whether the Jewish doctrine had developed in the direction of the Christian to anything like the extent which is sometimes asserted. But, in any case, the Christology of the Church had been decisively influenced by the career of

Jesus of Nazareth. I do not mean merely in the way of enrichment and precision. The Christology of the New Testament is not simply a development of pre-Christian Messianic dogma. The development has not gone in a straight line ; it has been violently deflected by the personality and the career of Jesus, and by the relations which Christians felt to subsist between themselves and their exalted Lord. The impact of His personality was not all at once realized or correctly measured, but the rate of advance was rapid, and within a brief period a very high doctrine of Christ's Person was formulated.

The Christology of the Apocalypse presents a curious combination of an exalted doctrine of the Person of Christ side by side with views which could not have been originated by a Christian author. This exalted view of Jesus, alongside of Jewish dogma untouched by Christian influence, has been one of the chief factors in eliciting the more recent theories as to the origin and literary structure of the Book. In no New Testament writing is a higher dignity accorded to the Person of Christ than in the Book of Revelation. He is represented as Divine in the strict sense of the term. He is the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last and the Living One, that is the Living One in the absolute sense. He searches the reins and the heart as God does, and gives to each according to his works. He is the Amen, the

Faithful and True, He is the Son of God and God is His Father in a unique sense. The language of the Old Testament about God is freely applied to Him. He is described in words borrowed from the description of the Ancient of Days in Daniel. When He appears in His glory John falls at His feet as dead. He is constantly co-ordinated with God. The angels are His messengers who do His bidding and receive from Him praise or rebuke. He is the Lord of lords and King of kings. He is also the object of worship, rendered not by men only but by the highest ranks of created being; and this is the more significant when we observe how the angel sternly rebukes the prophet for offering him worship, since this must be reserved for God alone. In view of this reiterated, this unambiguous statement, there ought to be no hesitation in asserting that for the writer, Christ belongs to a sphere altogether above the order of created being. It does not conflict with this that He receives the revelation from God which He communicates to the angel, that the author should speak of His God and Father or that He Himself should speak of Him as "my God." These phrases are perfectly compatible with what the author says elsewhere. And we must read in the light of the clearer passages those which seem to express a lower view. We must not infer from the words, "The beginning of the creation of God," that the writer numbered the Son among the creatures.

Nor are we to infer that He was regarded as an angel. The co-ordination in xiv. 10 "in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb" is not very close, and it involves no assimilation of the Lamb to the angels. More might be said with reference to the rather strange greeting in i. 4 where the seven Spirits which are before the throne are interpolated between God and Christ. But no importance can be attached to the strange order, nor is it likely that the seven Spirits should be regarded as angels and that Christ should be ranked with them. (See pp. 210f.)

From this we may pass to the author's Messianic doctrine. That Jesus is the true Messiah is his undoubted conviction. The term is used of Him again and again. He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah, He is the root and offspring of David, He is the Ruler of the kingdoms of the earth, the sovereignty of the world is to become that of our Lord and of His Messiah. In Him is to be fulfilled the promise of God in the second Psalm, that He should rule the nations with a rod of iron. In the opening vision He is described as "one like unto a son of man," with direct reference to Dan. vii. 13. So far we are on ground common to the Old Testament and to the New. But there is one section which neither Old nor New Testament avails to explain, and which cannot be fully accounted for by reference to the Messianic dogma of the con-

temporary Judaism. It is the famous vision, in the twelfth chapter, of the heavenly woman, the dragon, and the man-child, who is definitely identified with the Messiah. This passage is fully discussed elsewhere (pp. 32-39, 300-308) so that the briefest description must here suffice. Ultimately the conception of a heavenly woman, persecuted by the dragon with intent to slay her new-born child, and the catching up of the child to the throne of God while the mother escapes to a refuge in the wilderness, goes back to pagan mythology. In our Book it assures the reader that the Messiah has come into existence, He is in Heaven with God, waiting till the appointed time to come from His retreat and crush His foes.

Definitely Christian is the favourite representation of Jesus as the Lamb. In the present text of the Apocalypse the figure of the Lamb occurs twenty-nine times. It is possible that in some of these instances it may be a later insertion. It is, in fact, quite probable that this has happened in sections of Jewish origin. But it is, in my judgment, quite a mistake to give as large a scope to this principle as some scholars do. For example, it betrays very little religious insight to raise any objection to the conception of the wrath of the Lamb. Rather, we should say that there can be no wrath like the wrath of the Lamb, just as there can be no severity like the severity of love. The scene in which the Lamb is introduced is one of



singular interest. In the description of Heaven in the fourth chapter the Lamb is not present. Nor is He visible when the challenge to any who is worthy to take the book with seven seals is uttered. Only after the elder has reassured the weeping seer, comforting him with the tidings that the Lion of Judah has fulfilled the necessary qualifications, is the figure of the victor to be seen ; and then it is not a lion, but "a Lamb standing as if it had been slain." The significance of this is fully discussed elsewhere (pp. 264-267), it is accordingly unnecessary to say more of it at this point.

Whether the description of Him as "the Word of God," in Rev. xix. 14, is an interpolation or not, is disputed. It is quite true that the writer has only just said, "He has a name written which no one knoweth but himself." If the name indicated is the Word of God, then we must infer that the clause in question is an interpolation. But it is more probable that His secret ineffable name<sup>1</sup> is not to be identified with "the Word of God." This is the name by which He is *known to others*, but the inmost mystery of His being, as expressed in a name, was something known to Himself alone. The description of the "sharp sword which goeth out of His mouth" confirms the view that the writer thought of Him as the Word of God. The identification of Christ with the Logos had already

<sup>1</sup> On the secret name see pp. 243f.

been substantially made by Paul and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, though they had refrained from using the term. It is, therefore, not surprising to have this familiar Johannine description though in a somewhat different form in this passage.<sup>1</sup>

When we remember that the Revelation is a prophetic book we are rather surprised that the Spirit is not more prominent. Occasionally the prophet uses the phrase "to be in the Spirit" to describe the prophetic ecstasy, and the real speaker

<sup>1</sup> In his *Geschichte der Logosidee in der christlichen Litteratur* (1899), Aall finds points of contact with the doctrine of Philo. The Logos idea, he says, in its strictest form appears direct and unambiguous in this passage. "Certainly the conceptual framework is Jewish, but the content of the idea itself appears in a light which agrees well with the august theosophic hypostasis of Philo" (p. 49). He calls attention (p. 50) to elements in the description which fall outside the conventional apocalyptic. He concludes that the Græco-Philonic idea of the Logos with the signification "Word," appears here for the first time on Greek soil and as a designation of the Messiah revealed in the Person of Jesus. In view of the relation of Christians to Alexandria he regards it as unsatisfactory to explain the expression by accidental coincidence. The hypothesis of derivation is the more natural; it is indeed the only one which criticism permits (p. 51). It may be added that Aall regards the book as undoubtedly in great measure put together from Jewish fragments. He dates it between the end of Domitian's reign and the persecution under Trajan, leaning to the former. On the relation to the Fourth Gospel, he says: "That the two writings stand in inward literary relationship is verified, in spite of the numerous apparent divergences, more and more by thorough investigation. It is another question whether this solidarity necessarily implies identity of author. For our purpose it is enough to refer it to a common literary circle." This circle existed in Asia Minor and the Apocalypse was written by the Presbyter John (pp. 47f.).

in the prophetic utterances is the Spirit. Thus the urgent prayer for the Second Coming uttered by the inspired prophets in the Christian assemblies is intended in the words "the Spirit and the bride say, Come." It is remarkable that the letters to the seven churches dictated to the seer by Christ are also described as "what the Spirit saith to the Churches." The prophet seems to be conscious that whatever he utters in an ecstasy is due to the Spirit's inspiration. It is the Spirit who pronounces the blessing on those who from this time onward die in the Lord. The mention of the seven Spirits in the Trinitarian formula of i. 4 is discussed elsewhere (pp. 210f.), and the suggestion that the writer intends seven distinct beings has been set aside. Hort says significantly: "There is danger in assuming that only one form of speech is lawful on these mysterious subjects" (p. 11). These seven spirits before the throne are symbolized in the vision of Heaven by seven lamps of fire burning before the throne (iv. 5). Christ describes Himself as having the seven Spirits of God (iii. 1), and in the vision of the Book with Seven Seals the seven eyes of the Lamb are interpreted as "the seven Spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth."

Nowhere in the Bible are angels mentioned with such frequency as in the Apocalypse. The revelation is said to be communicated to the seer by an angel, he having received it from Christ to whom God

had given it. Twice the prophet offers worship to him. He receives the little book from an angel and eats it at his command. One of the angels who had the seven bowls explains to him the mystery of the scarlet woman and the Beast. One of the same group also shows him the descent of the Holy City, the Bride of the Lamb. Innumerable angels, "ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands" stand about the throne and sing the praises of the Lamb, or fall on their faces and worship God. There are seven angels who stand before God and receive the seven trumpets. The seven angels who receive from one of the living creatures the seven bowls fill the writer with astonishment. He speaks of them as a "sign in heaven, great and marvellous." Frequently the strength of the angels is emphasized. It is a strong angel who utters the challenge, "Who is worthy to open the book?" Another strong angel comes down on earth, clad in a cloud, with a rainbow on his head, his face like the sun, his feet like pillars of fire, with a little book open in his hand. He is so gigantic that he sets his right foot on the sea and his left on the land, he utters a shout like the roar of a lion and the seven thunders speak in response. He lifts his hand to heaven and swears by the eternal Creator that there shall be delay no longer. Another strong angel hurls a stone like a great millstone into the sea, symbolizing the downfall of Babylon. When Michael musters his angels

for war they defeat the dragon and his angels. They are beings of radiance so bright that when an angel having great authority descends from heaven the earth is illuminated with his glory. The angel who invites the birds to the great supper of God on the slain warriors of the Beast stands in the sun. Angels fly in mid-heaven proclaiming God's warnings and judgments. Another angel, unaided, chains the dragon and casts him into the abyss. Other angels reap the harvest and gather the vintage of earth. It is an angel who takes the censer and adds incense to the prayers of the saints, and then filling it with fire from the altar casts it upon the earth. At each of the twelve gates of the New Jerusalem stands an angel. It was a common Jewish belief that angels were associated with the elements or natural forces, hence we read of an angel of the waters (xvi. 5), also of an angel that has power over fire (xiv. 18). Four angels stand at the four corners of the earth holding the winds, and are bidden by another angel not to release them till the servants of God have been sealed. The close connexion of the angels with the stars is illustrated by the incident of the demon locusts. At the sounding of the fifth trumpet a star falls from heaven. This star, however, is a personal being, for he receives the key of the pit of the abyss and opens it. The four living creatures and the four and twenty elders essentially belong to the category of angels; but on these it is

unnecessary to add anything to what is said elsewhere (pp. 255-257).

The Book has not a little to say of the devil under various names. He is identified with the old serpent and with Satan and in particular with the dragon. He is described as a great red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and diadems on the heads. He is so immense that his tail sweeps off the sky a third of the stars and casts them down to earth. He waits for the birth of the Messiah that he may devour Him ; and when He is snatched from him to the throne of God, he pursues the mother, who on eagle's wings flies towards the wilderness. The earth swallows the flood that he sends out of his mouth to sweep her away, and then, having failed to destroy her, he goes to persecute her children, the brethren of the Messiah. Between the rapture of the child and the escape of the woman the story in its present form places the defeat, by Michael and his angels, of the dragon and his angels and their expulsion from heaven. Heaven is freed from the accuser of the brethren who accuses them before God day and night. Here we have a return to the rôle of the Satan in Zechariah and Job. Heaven's gain is in a sense earth's loss ; for the dragon has come into this lower world in great rage, and the anger at his defeat is intensified by his knowledge that his time is so short. He now acts through the two beasts and after they have been defeated by the



Messiah he is chained by an angel and cast into the abyss. After a thousand years he must, in harmony with the apocalyptic programme, be released for a little while; and having by the delusions he creates in his dupes gathered the nations against the saints and Jerusalem, they are consumed by fire from heaven while he is cast into the lake of fire to be there tormented for ever with the Beast and the false prophet. That the devil has his angels is clear from the story of the war in heaven; but we read also of the angel of the abyss whose name is Abaddon or Apollyon; and presumably the four angels who were bound at the Euphrates are evil angels. The hostile Jews are described as "a synagogue of Satan," and the persecution impending at Smyrna is directly ascribed to the devil. At Pergamum Satan has his throne, probably since a main seat of the worship of the emperor was there established. The false teachers at Thyatira claimed to "know the deep things of Satan."

While the dragon is the chief foe of the Church, he works for the most part through human agents. The world both Jewish and Pagan is hostile to the Christians. The author bitterly resents the slanders and intrigues of the Jews, as his description of them as a synagogue of Satan shows. He will not recognize their right to the honoured name, they say they are Jews and are not. To him Jerusalem, where the Lord was crucified, is Sodom and Egypt,

yet he speaks of it elsewhere as "the beloved city" (xx. 9).

The Jews, however, are almost insignificant in comparison with the heathen. The author is repelled by the moral as well as the religious abominations of Paganism. Murder, theft, uncleanness, falsehood, are condemned as well as idolatry. But naturally it is the last of these of which most is said; since it was here that the new religion came into sharpest conflict with the world. The worship of idols is mentioned, but all the stress lies on the worship of the Beast and his image and the compromise with idolatry involved in receiving his mark. Behind the Beast stands the dragon, in other words the emperor is the tool of Satan; and just as Satan secures his hold upon men by causing them to believe a lie, so it is through the miracles of the false prophet that faith in the Beast is confirmed. He deceives those who dwell on the earth by his signs. The writer anticipates that pressure, stopping short at no extremities, will be brought to bear to secure conformity with the State religion. Those who refuse to worship the emperor's image and receive his mark, will not be permitted to buy or sell, and beyond that lies the inevitable penalty of death. There are martyrs whose souls are under the altar crying for vengeance; but the great tribulation is still to burst in all its fury, and then a multitude which no man can number will die for the testimony of Jesus. For

the Beast will make war against the saints and overcome them. Rome is drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. In her is found the blood of saints and prophets and apostles. It is strange that there is no allusion to the atrocious cruelties of the Neronian persecution ; beheading is the one mode of death explicitly mentioned.

There is no detailed doctrine of redemption, but repeated references are made to the death of Christ. At the opening of the Book there is a doxology : " Unto him that loveth us and loosed us from our sins by his blood." When Christ appears to John, He includes in His self-description a reference to His death. The real answer to the question, Who is worthy to take the book ? is the " Lamb standing as though it had been slain." The four living creatures and the four and twenty elders sing a new song, and the burden of their song of redemption is that the Lamb was worthy to take the book, for He was slain and has purchased unto God with His blood men from every nation and made them a kingdom and priests unto God. And the angels count Him, for His death, worthy of the sevenfold reward. Those who came out of the great tribulation washed their robes and made them white in His blood. The martyrs triumphed because of the blood of the Lamb. It is in a garment sprinkled with blood that He rides forth at the head of the troops of heaven to war against the Beast. One

point may be specially mentioned, the Apocalypse does *not* describe the Lamb as slain from the foundation of the world. The interpretation of xiii. 6 is determined by xvii. 8.

The Book contains much of value on the Christian life. The letters to the seven churches are especially rich in this respect. In the course of the letters many qualities are selected for censure or for praise. On the one side the author blames the loss of the first love, the tolerance of false teaching and heathen living, the deadness disguised as life, the nauseating lukewarmness and self-complacency. And rebuke is enforced with threats. If Ephesus will not repent and return to its first love and its first works, its candlestick will be removed. To dead Sardis the Judge will come as a thief in the night, when His coming is not expected. Laodicea will be rejected with loathing. Against the false teachers Christ will make war with the sword of His mouth; Jezebel shall be laid on a bed of sickness and her children shall be slain with the pestilence. On the other hand the excellences of the Churches are carefully noted and cordially praised, their loyalty, their patience and unwearied endurance, their love and faith, their purity unspotted from the world, their zealous activity, their service of others. There is less to be drawn from the rest of the Book. The author is deeply impressed with the uncleanness of paganism and calls God's people out of Babylon lest they be

contaminated by its moral corruption. His recoil from heathen impurity is probably responsible for the estimate he puts upon celibacy. He lays stress on the blessedness of those who wash their robes, on him who watcheth and keepeth his garments. To fear God, to keep His commandments and the faith of Jesus, that is the ideal which he sets before his readers.

No useful purpose would be served by reproducing in detail the writer's anticipations as to the future. This would involve a repetition of a large part of the Book which is sufficiently dealt with elsewhere. But it is perhaps worth our while to bring together the promises made to Christians. In the seven letters the most glorious promises are made "to him that overcometh." His name will not be blotted out of the book of life, Christ will confess him before His Father and the angels, He will write upon him the name of God and of the New Jerusalem and His own new name. He will sit down with Christ on His throne and receive authority over the nations and rule over them with a rod of iron. He will abide like a steadfast pillar in the Temple of God. He shall not be hurt of the second death. Arrayed in white robes he will be permitted to eat of the tree of immortality in the Paradise of God, to which access had been barred by the cherubim and the whirling flaming sword. He will be nourished on the hidden manna and receive for a talisman the white stone with the secret name,

and to him will be given the morning star. He who is faithful unto death will receive a crown of life, and those who have kept their garments unsullied will walk with Christ in white.

When we turn from the seven letters to the rest of the Book similar promises are made to the victor. The author celebrates with lyrical rapture the blessedness of the martyrs, those who have come unscathed in soul through the great tribulation, who have come victorious from the Beast and standing by the glassy sea sing the triumphant song of Moses and the Lamb. Blessed are those dead who thus die in the Lord, they rest from their labours. To the martyrs it is granted to take part in the first resurrection. Blessed indeed are they who participate in it, over them the second death has no power, they are priests of God and of Christ, and reign with Him a thousand years. He strikes a note less congenial to us when he praises the hundred and forty-four thousand celibates, standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion, bearing His name, learning the new song and following Him whithersoever He goeth.

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## PART II.



## CHAPTER XI.

### John in the Island of Patmos.

THE Book opens with a double introduction. In i. 1-3 we have a title and brief statement as to the nature of the Book and the way in which the revelation it contained has been given. This is followed by a blessing on whosoever may read the Book in the Christian assembly<sup>1</sup> and on those who hear it read and live in harmony with its precepts. Twice in these three verses the characteristic note is struck that the time is at hand. John is named in the third person as the recipient of the message,<sup>2</sup> and the passage has the

<sup>1</sup> This verse shows that the Revelation was to be read aloud in the congregation; we cannot infer from the phrase "he that readeth" that the office of Reader had been developed as yet. On this office see the Excursus "On the Origin of the Readership and the Other Lower Orders" in Harnack's *Sources of the Apostolic Canons*.

<sup>2</sup> Hort takes i. 2 to refer to John's witness to Jesus before the authorities. The content of his witness was the word of God and confession of Christ before men. The "things that he saw" were not the visions in Patmos, but those things of which he had been an eye-witness. This would imply that

appearance of a commendatory prologue prefixed possibly by the author himself but more probably by others. In this respect we are reminded of the similar attestation given at the close of the Fourth Gospel. The second introduction is longer (i. 4-8) and in it John speaks in his own person. He invokes on the seven churches of Asia, to which he writes, the characteristic Christian benediction of grace and peace. Christian also is the designation of the source from which these blessings are to come, though the Trinitarian formula, which is here given, is without parallel in the New Testament. First he mentions "him who is and who was and who is to come." Thus he interprets the name of Israel's God Yahweh, the God of the past, the present and the future. But with his mind fixed on the near Second Coming of Christ, he substitutes, even when speaking about His Father, "who is to come" for "who is to be." With the Father he associates "the seven Spirits who are before the throne." It is not improbable that behind this expression we may detect the Persian doctrine of the seven Amshaspands.<sup>1</sup> But I cannot believe

John was an eye-witness of the ministry, Passion and Resurrection, and would perhaps favour though not necessarily imply apostolic authorship (cf. 1 John i. 1 "that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, . . . concerning the Word of life").

<sup>1</sup> On the Amshaspands (or Amesha Spentas) J. H. Moulton's discussions may be consulted, *Early Religious Poetry of Persia*, pp. 58-64, *Early Zoroastrianism*, pp. 96-115, 293-300, *The Treasure of the Magi*, pp. 21-25; also Williams Jackson's article

that the author himself thought of seven distinct heavenly beings. The other New Testament parallels offer convincing proof that by the seven Spirits the Holy Spirit must be intended. The author derived the description from Isaiah xi. 2 and presumably thought of the one Spirit with seven modes of manifestation. In particular we ought not, on the ground that he here associates seven angels with God and then proceeds to speak of Jesus Christ after them, to infer that the writer regarded Jesus Himself as merely an angel. This is out of harmony with his language elsewhere and nothing at all can be inferred from the order in which the three are mentioned, as though the enumeration moved downwards. This is quite clear from the order of the benediction in 2 Cor. xiii. 14. Moreover the reason why Jesus is

"Amesha Spentas" in ERE i. pp. 384f. where further literature is mentioned. He says they corresponded to archangels in Judaism and Christianity. Dr. Moulton considered that these "Immortal Holy Ones" were in Zarathushtra's own system the chief attributes of Ahura Mazda, and did not compromise monotheism, since "we have to do with concepts which are within the concept of God, not separate from it" (*Early Zoroastrianism*, p. 293 cf. p. 296). The number of these attributes was not fixed. Later they were defined as six and the collective name was given to them, the number was at a later time still expanded to seven, sometimes by the addition of Ahura Mazda to them, sometimes by the addition of Sraosha. On the parallel with Rev. i. 4 Moulton says, "This answers closely to the form of the Amshaspand doctrine in which the number seven is made up without including Ahura Mazda; and it is significant that the same form appears in *Tobit*, which we find to be based largely on Magian folk-story" (*Early Zoroastrianism*, p. 327).



mentioned at the end is quite obvious. It is because the author means to speak more fully of Him and therefore avoids the awkwardness of interpolating this ampler tribute of adoration in his Trinitarian formula. And here we touch a characteristic strain in his devotion, for he is not satisfied to add a description such as he had appended to his mention of the Father and the Spirit. His heart leaps at the very thought of Him. Nor can he pass on without the thrilling tribute of praise to Him who loves His people and has loosed<sup>1</sup> them from their sins by His blood. Thus early the song of the redeemed is on his lips, a strain to which, as we read the Book we shall listen again and again. Then he announces His coming with a retinue of clouds. Seen by every eye, His murderers are singled out for special mention, while all the tribes

<sup>1</sup> So the critical editors. The commentators are divided. J. Weiss prefers *λούσαντι* (he translates "cleansed through the blood" rather than "washed in his blood") so C. A. Scott and Bousset<sup>1</sup>; but in his second edition Bousset apparently prefers *λύσαντι* ("loosed"). The latter is much the better attested and is accepted by Simcox, Holtzmann-Bauer, Swete, Moffatt, and Hort, who says "the reading is certain" (p. 12). The phrase means "released us at the cost of his blood" and this reading should in all probability be accepted. If the other reading is adopted, the preposition should be taken as instrumental "washed," *i.e.*, "purified" "by his blood." There is no warrant for regarding the redeemed as washed in the blood of Christ. It is true that in Hebrew ritual purification was effected by blood, but it was not by bathing in blood; the blood was sprinkled upon those in need of purification. Cleansing was also effected by washing, but in water not blood. The fountain of Zech. xiii. 1 is not a fountain of blood.

of the earth wail because of Him.<sup>1</sup> This second introduction closes with a Divine utterance, in which God the Almighty describes Himself as the Alpha and Omega.

On this there follows an account of the vision in which the author receives his commission. A partner with his readers in the tribulation which they were enduring, and the patience through which alone they could overcome, he, John, was in Patmos for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. It was the first day of the week and he was rapt into an ecstasy. Behind him he heard a voice bidding him in trumpet tones write his vision in a book and send it to the seven Churches. He turned and saw seven lamps and in the midst of them a human form clad in a long robe which was gathered about His breast with a golden girdle. But He was white-haired like the Ancient of Days (Dan. vii. 9), with burning eyes, and feet shining like bronze, and His voice like the breakers as they dash on the shore. His face was dazzling as the noon-day sun ; seven stars were in His right hand and a keen sword with double edge issued from His mouth. Overwhelmed with terror John falls

<sup>1</sup> The writer is drawing upon Zech. xii. 10-12, especially "and they shall look unto me whom they have pierced : and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son." The prophet traces the mourning to penitence ; here it is usually thought that they wail with anguish and dread at the sight of Him as He comes to judgment. Hort rejects this, explaining that it is " the wailing of sorrowing repentance," as in Zechariah.

in a swoon ; but laying His right hand upon him the heavenly visitant bids him not be afraid. He claims for Himself the Divine attribute of eternity, He is the first and the last and the living One, the One who lives by inherent right and power. Yet He had died, but had passed out of death to immortal life, possessing the keys of death and of Hades, His vanquished foes. Then He gives John his commission ; he is to write down the vision he has seen, to describe the things which are and those which are yet to come, the mystery of the seven stars and the seven lamps.

In this vision there are several points of interest. It is disputed for what reason the author was in Patmos. His words may mean that he was there in order to receive the revelation, or that he was there to preach the Gospel, or that he had been sent there as a martyr for the Gospel. The first of these is improbable, since there seems to be no adequate reason why the revelation could not have been received on the mainland. Nor in view of the comparative unimportance of the island, is it likely that the author was devoting to its evangelisation those great gifts which would have found far larger scope elsewhere. It is accordingly more probable that he was there as an exile who had been banished to the island as a martyr for his faith. This is in accordance with ancient tradition<sup>1</sup> and with the

<sup>1</sup> Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Victorinus, Eusebius, Jerome, also Tertullian, though he simply says "an island,"

current practice. Banishment for life to one of the islands in the Ægean Sea, accompanied by deprivation of civil rights and the confiscation of all wealth save the pittance necessary for existence, was inflicted not infrequently on persons of good social position. Liberty of movement was permitted within the island and the victim was not ill-treated.<sup>1</sup> But Ramsay argues that since John belonged to the common people and his crime was the grave offence of Christianity, he could not have been punished with this comparatively mild sentence known as "deportation to an island." In such cases the treatment was far more severe. The penalty to which John would be subject was, he says, that of banishment combined with hard labour for life, a penalty for humbler criminals, provincials and slaves, to which many Christians were subjected. He says: "It was in its worst form a terrible fate: like the death penalty it was preceded by scourging, and it was marked by perpetual fetters, scanty clothing, insufficient food, sleep on the bare ground in a dark prison, and work under the lash of military overseers. It is an unavoidable conclusion that this was St. John's punishment."<sup>2</sup> In view of the

without naming Patmos. It is noteworthy that Irenæus does not mention the banishment; and some modern scholars believe that while John was in Patmos, the story that he was sent there as a convict is simply a false inference from Rev. i. 9 (so Bleek, pp. 124, 152-156, Reuss, *History of N.T.*, p. 161, Harnack *EBr*<sup>9</sup> xx. p. 501, Bousset<sup>2</sup> pp. 47f., 192).

<sup>1</sup> Ramsay, *Letters* p. 83.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 84f.

exegetical uncertainties of the passage and our ignorance of the circumstances we must leave some room for doubt ; but assuming that John had not voluntarily undertaken the evangelisation of Patmos, nor had retired there to receive his revelation, it is hardly probable that an obscure Jew from the provinces, found guilty of a crime so grave could have received the lighter form of penalty. Victorinus, writing on Rev. x. 11, says that when John saw this he was in the island of Patmos, having been condemned to the mines (or to the quarries) by Domitian. Apparently there are at present no mines in Patmos, but Mr. Fitzpatrick, the President of Queen's College, Cambridge, who spent a fortnight on Patmos in 1887, says that there are quarries. Possibly then it was to hard labour in these quarries that John was condemned.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The phrase employed by Victorinus is "in metallum damnatus." "Metallum" is used both for "mine" and "quarry," and convicts were sent to hard labour in both. Ramsay says "there were no mines in Patmos," and adds that careful exploration might determine whether any quarries were worked there (p. 85). E. A. Abbott quotes a letter from Prof. Nairne who visited the island in 1887, in which he says, "I do not remember any mines or quarries. I am almost certain none were being worked while we were there, and I don't think I saw any disused ones" (*Notes*, pp. 114f.). But the Rev. T. C. Fitzpatrick in a description of a fortnight's stay on the island in the spring of 1887, printed in *Christ's College Magazine*, Easter Term, 1887, says: "Down the middle of the island ran a succession of hills ; in one of them, in the northern half of the island, there are quarries. This, perhaps, is the explanation of the statement that St. John was 'damnatus in metallum,' as there do not appear to have been any mines, properly so called. The rock is volcanic." (Quoted by Swete, pp. clxxiii.f., Abbott,

Patmos, now commonly known by its mediæval name Patino, is a small island of the Ægean, belonging to the group known as the Sporades.<sup>1</sup> It is forty miles from the mainland, but though so near, the island is now difficult of access, since it does not pay the steamers to call. Its area is about twenty-one square miles, but its coast-line is about forty miles long. Its outline is broken and irregular to an extreme degree; there are

*Notes*, p. 116). Dr. Abbott warns us that the prevalence of earthquakes about the Ægean Sea must be taken into account in estimating the value of negative evidence as to the non-existence of mines and quarries in Patmos in the reign of Domitian (pp. 115f.). I have searched through Mr. Geil's *The Isle that is called Patmos* for information on this matter; but all I can find is an incidental reference on p. 46 in the description of the Acropolis, "It is built of the coarse native porphyry, gray and porous, quarried on the west of the mountain, near the pond." His book, with all its irrelevancies, contains so much detailed information, that the failure to deal explicitly with this point is tantalising.

<sup>1</sup> On Patmos the following may be consulted: Dean Stanley, *Sermons Preached before His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales during His Tour in the East* (1863), pp. 225-231; Tozer, *The Islands of the Ægean* (1890), pp. 178-195; Geil, *The Isle that is Called Patmos*. The description in the text is drawn from these works, all of which rest on personal observation. Mr. Geil visited the island twice, staying, I gather, a fortnight on each occasion. Renan gives a brilliant description of the Archipelago generally, not so much of Patmos in particular (pp. 372-379). Tozer gives a small map of the island on p. 180, and Macdonald gives a larger one in his *St. John*. But a far more vivid impression of its strange configuration and the indentation of its coast-line is given by the larger map prefixed to Milligan's exposition in Schaff's *Popular Commentary*, and the map in Geil's work; the latter embodies corrections made by the author on his visit in 1904. His volume also contains a number of photographs.



innumerable bays, eleven of them large bays. To gain any impression of its extraordinary shape it is necessary to inspect a large map. Tozer says, "In shape Patmos may be roughly described as forming a crescent, the horns of which face eastward ; but its outline is broken up by innumerable promontories enclosing landlocked creeks, so that, when seen from above, it presents somewhat the aspect of a strange polypus" (pp. 179f.). It really consists of three rocky masses united in one case by a strip of sand about 100 yards wide, and in the other by a strip of pebbles of similar width. These isthmuses provide four sheltered ports. The island itself is hilly and rugged, with very little soil, no rivers and few springs, and scarcely any roads, The climate is semi-tropical.

Several writers have speculated on the impression which the scenery has left on the Book. Dean Stanley was convinced that the impression was deep, and that "we understand the Apocalypse better for having seen Patmos." Speaking of the view from the summit he says : "At his feet lay Patmos itself, like a huge serpent, its rocks contorted into the most fantastic and grotesque forms, which may well have suggested the 'beasts' with many heads and monstrous figures, the 'great dragon' struggling for victory" (p. 230). Tozer is more cautious, but calls attention to the references to the sea, and still more to the islands. He adds, "But even if we hesitate to admit the direct

suggestiveness of such points as these, we may, at least, feel that the scenery of this island, from its grandeur and wildness, and the sense of space and solitude which it conveys, was well suited to form a background in the mind's eye of the seer for the wonderful visions of the Apocalypse" (p. 190). Geil describes the marvellous fog-effects, which he thinks may have suggested scenes in the Revelation (pp. 281f.).

The island of Santorin or Thera is notable for its volcanic activity and it can be seen from Patmos. Stanley called attention to it in this connexion;<sup>1</sup> and more recently Mr. Bent devoted an article to the influence exerted by the spectacle on the author of the Apocalypse.<sup>2</sup> Such suggestions are, of course, deserving of consideration, but they must be controlled by due regard to the parallels with older writings or oral tradition, which were untouched by contact with the scenery of Patmos.

In spite of weighty opinion to the contrary, it

<sup>1</sup> "'A great mountain' like that of the volcanic Thera, 'as it were burning with fire' was 'to be cast into the sea.'" In a footnote he adds, "I have not enlarged upon this. But the extraordinary aspect of Thera (the modern Santorin), even when its volcanic fires were dormant, may well have furnished this image."

<sup>2</sup> *What St. John Saw in Patmos*, in *The Nineteenth Century* (1888). On Santorin the article in EBr<sup>11</sup> may be consulted, and there is a special monograph on its volcanic activities, by F. Fouqué, *Santorin et ses Éruptions*. Tozer's description may be found on pp. 94-110, and there is a map on p. 97. He enumerates (p. 99) the principal eruptions in historic times as occurring in 196 B.C.; A.D. 726, 1573, 1650, 1707, 1886.

seems probable that we should take the author to mean that the ecstasy in which the vision was seen seized him on a Sunday. It is possible to interpret "I was present in an ecstasy at the Day of the Lord." In that case the seer would represent himself as carried forward in Spirit to the consummation, the great Day of the Lord.<sup>1</sup> But this is for various reasons improbable, and assuming the later date of the Book it is by no means unlikely that the first day of the week had

<sup>1</sup> This view was taken by Wetstein (*Hunc diem iudicii vidit in Spiritu*, i.e., *prævidit representatum*). Futurist interpreters have not unnaturally been inclined to it, thus Maitland paraphrases the clause "I was rapt by the Spirit into the great day of the Lord." But modern scholars of other schools have taken it in the same way. So Stuart Russell who adds "the Parousia is the standpoint of the seer in the Apocalypse" (pp. 371f.). Huidekoper says, "The tenor of the book requires us to understand by this the day of the Lord's coming" (p. 262). He refers to Origen in *Joan.* x. 20, "The whole house of Israel shall be raised in the great κυριακῇ Day of the Lord, death having been conquered." Lightfoot, in his note on Ignatius, *Epistle to the Magnesians* ix., says, "the interpretation is doubtful, and there are good, if not conclusive reasons for interpreting it of 'the day of judgment,' see Todd's *Discourses on Prophecies in the Apocalypse*, pp. 59, 295sq." (*Ignatius and Polycarp*<sup>2</sup> ii. 129). Hort, with hesitation, prefers it as, though giving a less natural sense, better in harmony with the context, while the technical sense of the word = Sunday can hardly have been acquired by this time. This argument depends for its force largely on the early date accepted by Hort. Deissmann, in the article "Lord's Day" in *EBi*, and Selwyn (p. 192) also take this view.

It may be added that Düsterdieck, who rejects the reference to the Day of the Lord, thinks the day intended was Easter Sunday of A.D. 70, the day of the Lord's resurrection being pre-eminently the Lord's Day of the year.

by this time received the technical designation of the Lord's Day.

The seer is bidden to write to "the seven churches." They are spoken of as if they were a definitely known group. The question arises why the seven churches named should have been grouped together in this way, and why these churches should be selected. In view of the dominant part played by the number seven in the work, the most obvious suggestion is that we have here an illustration of that principle. On the other hand if this grouping had already been made and its designation given, and if it was not coined by the apocalypticist himself, it is natural to seek for some other explanation. The list does not include all the churches of Asia in existence at the time, so that a principle of selection has been at work. A glance at a map of the province, in which the roads are marked as in Swete's *Commentary*, shows that a messenger coming to Ephesus from Patmos, in going north to Pergamum and then turning south-east to Laodicea, would take the seven cities in the following order: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea (Zahn, *INT*, iii. p. 422). It surely cannot be accidental that this is precisely the order in which the seven churches are named. They are the churches on two main roads which from Ephesus and Laodicea crossed at Pergamum. Yet while this may account for the order in which they are mentioned, it does not fully explain why

just these seven are selected and why other cities on the route in which there were churches, for example Hierapolis, are not included. It has been suggested that they were the seven chief towns in that part of the province, or that they shared the festival of the association for the worship of the Emperor to which we know that five of them belonged. It has also been surmised that there were several groups of churches at the head or centre of which one of the seven churches stood and that these were already centres of communication for the other members of the groups. We must probably remain content with stating the possibilities.

But even if the churches formed convenient centres from which the Book was to be distributed to other members of each group, we must not allow this possibility to blur the fact that each of the seven letters is intended for the church to which it professes to be addressed and is precisely adapted to the conditions of that church. Although the letters are combined into a literary unity, and are attached to an apocalypse designed for all the churches, they are yet real letters, which accurately reflect the conditions in the communities addressed, and are limited in their primary reference to those communities alone. Other churches may take warning or win encouragement, and the conditions described may be partially reflected in other churches. But we must not imagine that the

seven churches are designed to represent in their combination the universal Church, or successive periods in the career of the visible Church from the close of the Apostolic period till the Second Coming.

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## CHAPTER XII.

### The Letters to the Seven Churches.

THE letters to the seven churches are skillfully constructed. They follow, though not slavishly, a particular form. First we have the command to write to the angel of the particular church. Each letter opens with a self-description by Christ its author, largely though not entirely derived from the description in the opening vision. The message itself begins with an affirmation by the speaker that He knows the circumstances of the church, usually in the form "I know thy works," though in Smyrna and Pergamum the formula is varied to suit the special conditions. A description of the church follows with the warning and rebuke, or the praise and encouragement, which it deserves. The letters close with the general exhortation, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the Churches," and there is a promise "To him that overcometh," assuring him, often in mystical language, of his reward.

The order in which the churches are mentioned has been supposed by some to be determined by

the moral and spiritual state of the church addressed. Thus Godet affirms that the four churches with odd numbers exhibit gradation in evil, the three churches with even numbers exhibit progress in good.<sup>1</sup> A similar view is taken by Bovon.<sup>2</sup> The late Dr. Milligan, however, who also discovers two groups makes them to consist of the first three and the last four, the former representing "the Church of Christ in herself," the latter "the Church of Christ as she mingles with the world and learns its ways."<sup>3</sup> It is very questionable whether either of these views can be accepted. Really the conditions are too mixed to allow such a principle of classification to be carried through without artificiality, and some violence. And we have already seen that the order in which the churches are named is determined by the route which a messenger from Ephesus would follow in visiting each in turn. In the case of Ephesus, Pèrgamum and Thyatira the church receives praise, qualified by the warning that Christ has something against them. Smyrna and Philadelphia receive unqualified praise; Sardis condemnation qualified by the recognition of a small remnant, and Laodicea condemnation without any qualification whatever.

Sir William Ramsay considers that the author "reads the history and the fate of the Churches

<sup>1</sup> p. 303.

<sup>2</sup> p. 502.

<sup>3</sup> SPC p. 398.

in the natural features, the relations of earth and sea, winds and mountains, which affected the cities.”<sup>1</sup> He also emphasizes allusions in the seven letters to events in the history of the cities and their conditions at the time. Some of the latter had of course been observed by earlier scholars. The views of so eminent an explorer and epigraphist who has formed his opinions on the spot, bringing to bear on the scene not only the faculties of a naturally gifted, trained and experienced observer, but familiarity also with the history of the cities and the references to them in ancient writers, demand the most respectful consideration, and at several points no doubt the student finds a passage lit up for him with a welcome illumination. Yet the idea that the history and fate of the churches could be divined from the natural features of the districts in which the cities were situated and the physical influences which played upon them introduces a suggestion of fatalism. It makes too much of tyrannical Nature, too little of triumphant grace. It also implies too close an identity between the city and the church for those whose citizenship was in heaven, who knew themselves to be pilgrims and strangers on earth, and who looked for the New Jerusalem to descend from heaven and the tabernacle of God to be found among men. At certain points the theory seems to have exercised a disturbing influence on the interpretation. While,

<sup>1</sup> *Letters* p. viii.

then, it may be freely granted that the natural environment of the cities, their condition at the time, and outstanding events in their history, may have influenced the churches, have guided the author in his reflections on their state and his forecast of their future, and moulded his expression, we must beware of making too much of what may be chance coincidence or forcing on phrases a sense which they do not naturally bear.

The letters are addressed to the angels of the churches. A view, once widely received but now generally rejected, is that the angel is the bishop of the church. Any interpretation is, of course, attended with difficulty, but the arguments against this interpretation appear to be decisive. Among recent scholars of the first rank it has, it is true, been accepted by Zahn<sup>1</sup> and J. Weiss,<sup>2</sup> the latter showing here as at some other points the influence of Zahn, where that great and learned interpreter goes wrong rather than right. Since, however, he diverges from Zahn in the view that the seven letters were written before the destruction of Jerusalem, his interpretation becomes much more difficult, for it is highly improbable that the monarchical episcopate had been developed so early. Zahn himself says, referring to J. Weiss, "It is incomprehensible how one can admit that the 'angels' refer to the bishops, and still hold

<sup>1</sup> INT pp. 413-417, 423.

<sup>2</sup> *Off.* p. 49, *SNT* pp. 96f.

that Rev. ii.-iii. was written *circa* 65-70.”<sup>1</sup> Whether even by the end of Domitian’s reign the church in each of the seven cities had one man at its head may be debated ; but at that date the objection to such an interpretation derived from the history of the organisation would not be fatal. But there are serious objections to it. The use of such a term in this sense is unparalleled. Moreover in a Book where the word is used so frequently and always elsewhere in the sense of “angel,” we are scarcely entitled to impose another sense on it, not to say an unparalleled sense, except for very cogent reasons. It is true that according to a well-attested reading in ii. 20 the angel is rebuked for tolerating the conduct of his wife Jezebel, and this is accepted by Grotius, Zahn and J. Weiss. The textual evidence, however, is not at all decisive, and we must allow our decision on the general question to guide our decision on the text rather than permit a disputed reading to determine our view on the right interpretation of the angels of the churches. It is also true that there is a difficulty in the representation of letters being addressed to an angel at all, and this is aggravated by the fact that the letter is actually sent to the church. There is also something strange in the situation implied. Christ who lives in heaven addresses the angel who is also in heaven, through two earthly intermediaries, the seer and the church. These difficulties are

<sup>1</sup> INT p. 417.

serious, but less grave than those which attach to the alternative view and some mitigation of them is possible.<sup>1</sup>

In determining the more precise sense of the term it is important to remember that it is really on the character and works of the churches themselves that judgment is passed. The angel is addressed with praise or blame, with promise or rebuke. But the angel is so identified with the church that the qualities and actions of the church are put to his account as if they were his own. This in itself it may be added is a reason against the view that the bishop is addressed, since it implies too complete a solidarity between himself and the church, too entire a concentration of responsibility in the head for the merits and shortcomings of the body. On similar grounds we must reject the view that the angels of the churches are their guardian angels. They are rather the celestial counterparts of the earthly organisms; and as Dr. J. H. Moulton pointed out,<sup>2</sup> the nearest parallel is to be found in the Persian doctrine of the Fravashi. Other New Testament parallels are

<sup>1</sup> See Hort's note, pp. 18f. That the "angels" are not rulers or bishops is the generally accepted view. It may be added that Knopf gives a fairly full discussion but with very inconclusive results (pp. 207-209). On the whole he seems to favour the view that the angels were the bishops of the Churches.

<sup>2</sup> In the article "It is his Angel," published in JTS iii. 514-527, reprinted in *A Neglected Sacrament*, pp. 44-61. See also his *Early Zoroastrianism*, pp. 274, 325, *The Treasure of the Magi*, p. 104.



the statement that the angels of the little children always behold the face of the Father in heaven, and the incredulous reply "It is his angel," to the news brought by the excited Rhoda that it was Peter who was knocking at the door. The doctrine is foreign to our modes of thought but it gives us the clue to complete identification of the angel with his church in its virtues and its faults, which is difficult to account for on any other view. That the angel rather than the church is addressed must in any case seem strange; but the complete identification of the two diminishes, if it does not remove, the difficulty. The angels are spoken of as stars, in harmony with a widespread view of their connexion with the heavenly bodies. And while the stars shine in heaven, the earthly counterpart of the angels, the churches, are represented as lamps. It must of course be clearly recognized that according to current Jewish belief, which is found also in the New Testament, the angels were not regarded as sinless;<sup>1</sup> so that no difficulty need be felt in the attribution to the angels of the churches of the sins or the virtues of their communities.

The faults which are censured suggest that the churches were not of quite recent formation. The Church of Ephesus has fallen from the fervour of its first love and is no longer doing its first work.

<sup>1</sup> I must state this without proof; those who desire to see my evidence may consult the section on Angelology in the introduction to my commentary on Colossians (EGT iii. pp. 478-484).

In Thyatira, on the contrary, the last works are more than the first. Dry rot has set in at Sardis and it has spread far, leaving few things unaffected. Of life little but the name is left, of deeds there is nothing. Such is the sad record as a whole, yet there is a remnant of the undefiled, worthy to walk with their Lord in white. Laodicea is tepid and conceited, vaunting her wealth and blind to her wretched spiritual poverty. The pace at which degeneration moves varies greatly in different conditions ; nevertheless the natural suggestion is that these churches have a fairly long history behind them.

The same conclusion results from the references to false teaching. Here again no doubt caution is necessary. Not only were the Pauline churches disturbed by the Judaistic controversy, which of course was due to the clash of an older type of Christianity with that taught by the Apostle ; but in the church of Colossæ another type of false teaching had found a footing, threatening the invasion of an obsolete ceremonial and distributing among a number of angels that fulness of the Godhead which dwelt in Jesus as an organic whole.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This I take, with Erich Haupt, our foremost commentator on Colossians, to be the meaning of Col. ii. 9. The fulness of the Godhead dwells in Christ "bodily-wise," as a body ; therefore the *whole* fulness dwells in Him and His people find in Him that which supplies every need ; it is not split up and distributed among a plurality of spiritual beings, so that the suppliant must approach one angel for this boon and another for that. (See EGT iii. pp. 523f.)

Possibly we might refer also to the Pastoral Epistles, but these are not improbably the offspring of a later period. So, too, if there were strong reasons for dating the seven letters before the destruction of Jerusalem, we might take the allusions to the Nicolaitans and the teaching of Balaam, to those who claimed to be apostles but had been convicted of fraud, as interposing no insuperable barrier to so early a date. Yet on the whole the stage of development suggested points to the last quarter of the first century. The nature of the false teaching is unfortunately not clear. The name Nicolaitans conveys but little information. The connexion of the false teaching with Nicolas, the proselyte of Antioch who was appointed one of the seven (Acts vi. 5), is very dubious;<sup>1</sup> but

<sup>1</sup> Irenæus identifies the founder of the sect with Nicolas of Antioch (I. xxvi. 3), whether on the basis of any tradition is uncertain. Zahn thinks it deserves credence "because it contradicts the nature of ecclesiastical legend-making, when it imputes evil to a Christian who is mentioned with honour in the N.T." (INT p. 419). Lightfoot also accepts it on similar grounds (*Galatians*<sup>9</sup> pp. 297f.). Hort (p. 23) regards the connexion as "most problematical," and concludes that there is no reason to accept the identification. As he points out the name was "extremely common." P. Gardner says the Nicolaitans "must have been the followers of one Nicolas." He regards the identification with Nicolas of Antioch as "a very attractive conjecture"; he infers from his Greek name and association with Philip and Stephen that he was a progressive, and founded the party at Ephesus (*Ephesian Gospel* p. 37). Moffatt (EGT pp. 351f.) thinks there is no reason to doubt the original connexion with him, but leaves the question open whether misuse of some tenet of his was made, or whether he was actually a dangerously lax teacher. Schürer discusses the question in his monograph on Jezebel (see below pp. 247f.) and

presumably the name of the sect is taken from a founder called Nicolas. Nor can we say with certainty in what relation the Nicolaitans stood to those who held the teaching of Balaam.<sup>1</sup> The latter are charged with teaching immorality and the lawfulness of eating meats offered to idols ; and the prophetess at Thyatira who is called Jezebel is similarly asserted to be guilty of the same seductive teaching and practice. If the early date for the Epistles is accepted, there would be some plausibility in the view taken by the Tübingen critics<sup>2</sup> and by Renan<sup>3</sup> that the assault on the false teaching was

argues that Nicolas is no historical name but simply a designation of Balaam. He points out that the later Jewish account, as given by Philo and especially by Josephus, of Balaam and Balak goes beyond what is related in Numbers, and has left its mark on our passage. The name Nicolas, "conqueror of the people," was suggested by Balaam's advice to Balak to seduce the Hebrews to idolatry by the agency of the Midianite women, since thus alone could they "conquer" them for a short space of time.

<sup>1</sup> Vitringa's equation of Balaam and Nicolas, the latter being the Greek equivalent of the former, is accepted by some modern scholars. Zahn says the theory "deserves at last to be buried" (p. 419), and Hort also emphatically rejects it. The two names are not philologically equivalent, though we must not be too strict in our demands on popular etymologies. But unless the readers were familiar with "Nicolaitans" as the actual name of a party or school, the author could hardly have used it without explanation.

<sup>2</sup> Baur, *Evangelien* p. 368, NTTh. p. 214, CH i. 84-87 ; Schwegler, p. 254 ; Hilgenfeld, pp. 413-417.

<sup>3</sup> *L'Antechrist* pp. 348f., 363-368. John's intolerance is depicted in a most unlovely light (p. 347). His antagonism was keenest against the conventicles of the new Balaam, *i.e.*, Paul (p. 348). The Nicolaitans were Paul's partisans ; the reference to those who say they are apostles and are not is apparently an allusion to Paul (p. 363). In the phrase "a

directed against Paul. They connected with it the praise given to the Church of Ephesus for testing those who called themselves apostles and were not, and the reference to the blasphemy of those who falsely claimed to be Jews but were in truth a synagogue of Satan. We should then have to see in these passages the expression of a narrow and severe Jewish temper which shrank from Paul's teaching on meats offered to idols and his handling of the marriage problem. But while plausible this would not be sound. The Jewish Christian

synagogue of Satan " the object of attack is the same : " Here Satan represents idolatry. The religious assemblies of Paul's partisans are for our author idolatrous feasts, since unclean food and meat offered to idols are eaten there, as in the feasts of the heathen after their sacrifices " (p. 364). Jezebel was one of his disciples (p. 366). P. Gardner continues this line of interpretation in a more moderate form ; he does not identify the Nicolaitans with the Pauline party, but takes them to have been its advanced wing. The Apocalypticist was thoroughly hostile to the Pauline party, which he regarded as a very synagogue of Satan ; he denied Paul's claim to apostleship (*The Ephesian Gospel*, pp. 35-38). In this connexion I may refer to what he says on the exaggerations of Baur (p. 38). This interests me because in 1897 I expressed a similar view in my *Guide to Biblical Study* : " Yet with all the divergence between the reconstruction of the history which Baur gave and that which is probably true, let us never forget how immense is the debt we owe to him for setting us our problems and the stimulus he has given to critical investigation. And indeed I am not sure if, in the rebound from his views, we have not been carried too far in the opposite direction " (p. 193). But on the view that the Apocalypticist was an opponent of Paul, and on Weizsäcker's opinion that there was a break in the continuity of the Asian Church, Paul's work being destroyed and replaced by a new structure on the ruins of the old, I cordially agree with J. Weiss that it has " not the slightest support in the sources " (*Off.* p. 53).



apostles had recognized the apostleship of Paul ; and while the apostle to the Gentiles had occupied, for the sake of argument, the standpoint of the latitudinarians at Corinth that the question was not one of principle, and proved that the practice was not expedient and involved a violation of love ; when he came to express his own view on the matter, he repudiated the idol feast as a communion with demons, incompatible with the table of the Lord. His denunciation of immorality left nothing to be desired. That the writer should have had Paul and his associates in mind in the phrase “ a synagogue of Satan ” is not to be lightly believed, especially when he contrasts the present condition of the church unfavourably with their first love which must refer to the period when Paul was labouring to establish the church. It might be less improbable to find in the false teachers those who perverted his doctrine of grace and freedom from the Law into a defence of a licentious antinomianism and an obliteration of the line between heathen and Christian practice. If, however, we bring the letters down to a later period, we may dismiss the theory of an attack on Paul and Paulinism and find the false teaching attacked in some form of Gnosticism. The laxity of practice which the author specially condemns was characteristic of some Gnostic schools, and its more theoretical side, expressed in the phrase “ who know not the deep things of Satan, as they say,” points strongly



in the same direction. The Nicolaitans are apparently identical with those who hold the teaching of Balaam. Rev. ii. 15 does not imply a distinction, but means that just as Balaam taught his ruinous doctrine formerly, so the Nicolaitans propagate their heresy now in like manner. If they are two distinct parties they presumably represented similar tendencies. It is possible that the false apostles at Ephesus were Nicolaitan teachers.

The cooling of love, the lukewarmness, the toleration of false teaching and false teachers, the lethargy and unwatchfulness which infect one or other of the churches suggest that they were not at the time suffering from an intense persecution. Certainly there was a measure of persecution. Smyrna is encouraged not to fear the things she is about to suffer; the devil is going to cast some of them into prison, that they may be tried, and they will have tribulation ten days. Apparently the Jews are the aggressors, the author describes them as a synagogue of Satan, unworthy to bear the honourable name of Jews. Pergamum dwells where Satan's throne is, it had not denied its faith in the days of Antipas, Christ's faithful witness, "who was killed among you, where Satan dwelleth." Philadelphia is to be kept from the hour of trial which is to come upon the whole world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. It can scarcely be said, then, that behind the letters there appears

a background of severe persecution. One martyr had been slain in the past in the city where Satan was enthroned. Possibly the reference "in the throne of Satan" is to the worship of Asclepius, but if the later date is correct, more probably the author has in mind the cult of the Emperor (see pp. 240f.). Some persecution is impending, they are bidden to be faithful unto death. The hour of trial is not so much persecution, but the woes connected with the consummation which will fall with special severity on the unbelieving world. It is the unsatisfactory features in the life of the churches and the suggestion that though there may be persecution it will be comparatively mild, which form two of the strongest points in the position of those who detach the first three chapters from the apocalypse which follows. Probably, however, this conclusion should not be accepted.

Ephesus is naturally placed first of the seven churches. It was the chief city of the province and not improbably the writer's home; but it was also the first of the churches which a messenger from Patmos would reach. The church is praised for its labours and patience. It has endured without growing weary. In particular its hatred of false teaching and the corresponding practice is recognized, its zeal in the exposure of false apostles. But while its work has been energetically carried on and its hate of antinomian conduct has been worthy of commendation, the church has fallen away from

the intensity of its early love and for this its other qualities cannot atone. Hence it is summoned to repentance and a return to its primal state. The failure to obey will lead to a removal of its candlestick from its place. Ramsay has described Ephesus as the city of change, which had in its effort to keep near the sea been compelled to move its position. He explains that what is foretold is a change in local position: the church should begin its career afresh on a new site with a better spirit.<sup>1</sup> But this seems to do no adequate justice to the sternness of the threat, and the natural sense is that the candlestick will be taken away altogether. The promise here, as throughout, is made to the victor, and in this case it is the promise of immortality, admission to that privilege, which man forfeited in Eden, to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God (xxii. 2, 14).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Letters* pp. 242-246.

<sup>2</sup> The expectation that the tree of life would be restored to man's use is found in several of the Jewish apocalypses. See especially the description in Enoch xxivf. After a description of its beauty, we read in Michael's reply to the patriarch, "And as for this fragrant tree no mortal is permitted to touch it till the great judgment, when he shall take vengeance on all and bring (everything) to its consummation for ever. It shall then be given to the righteous and holy. Its fruit shall be food for the elect: it shall be transplanted to the holy place, to the temple of the Lord, the Eternal King." Apparently from what follows, "And they shall live a long life on earth, such as thy fathers lived," the eating of the tree did not secure immortality, but a lengthening of life to the antediluvian measure. It is to be made accessible in the Temple at Jerusalem. In the Testament of Levi xviii. we read, "And he shall open the gates of paradise, And shall remove the threatening sword against

Smyrna is of special interest to us because it is the church over which Polycarp at a later time presided and from which he passed to receive the martyr's crown. In promoting that martyrdom the Jews were specially active, and here already they are circulating slanders about the Christians. Jews as they are by race, the author deems them unworthy of that honourable name; they are indeed a synagogue, but it is a synagogue of Satan. Their slanders will not remain without effect. Suffering awaits the church which it must meet without fear. The devil will test their fidelity and courage, for stirred up by the Jews the heathen authorities will imprison some of them and they must prepare for

Adam. And he shall give to the saints to eat from the tree of life, And the spirit of holiness shall be on them." So in II. Esdras (=IV. Ezra) viii. 52, "For unto you is paradise opened, the tree of life is planted." The reference to Paradise raises difficult questions, which cannot be discussed here. Representations as to the locality of Paradise varied, sometimes the earthly, sometimes the heavenly Paradise is intended. It should not be too hastily assumed that the heavenly Paradise is here intended. The garden of Eden was supposed still to exist on earth, and man's banishment from it was to be cancelled. With this return to the primal condition, the saints may eat the tree, to prevent their eating of which exclusion from Eden had been necessary (Gen. iii. 22-24). In Rev. xxii. 3 the tree of life is in the New Jerusalem, but apparently the term there stands for a number of trees "the wood of life." On the whole subject Bousset *RJ*<sup>2</sup> pp. 324-328, Gressmann pp. 217-221, Box, *The Ezra-Apocalypse*, pp. 195-197, and articles in Dictionaries may be consulted. Ramsay (*Letters* pp. 246-249) discusses the tree of life, pointing out that the idea would not seem strange to the Asian readers. He allows, of course, that it is taken from the author's Jewish sphere of thought, and that we know no parallel expression in Greek literature.

the worst. Faithfulness unto death will be rewarded with a crown of life. Here there may be a reference, as Ramsay suggests, to the crown of Smyrna, the garland of splendid buildings with the street of gold which encircled the rounded hill Pagos. Apollonius had advised the citizens to prefer a crown of men to a crown of buildings. Here Christ promises a crown of life. The closing promise is that the victor should not be hurt by the second death. The second death is later in the book (xx. 14) identified with the lake of fire which burns with fire and brimstone. This reminds us most vividly of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.<sup>1</sup> The victor shall be spared from that awful fate, as Lot was delivered from sharing the destruction of Sodom.

The message to Pergamum opens with the words, "I know where thou dwellest, *even* where Satan's throne is." Several interpreters<sup>2</sup> take the reference to be to the worship of Asclepius the Healer. Hort says: "Doubtless those are right who refer this to

<sup>1</sup> Temple says: "The blessings of Paradise before the Fall, of deliverance from the Flood, of the manna in the wilderness, of the triumphs of Solomon's vast empire, are promised to the first four churches; the blessings of Baptism, of Church membership, of a seat in the great Court of Justice which is to judge the world, are promised to the last three" (*Rugby Sermons* p. 25). The Flood might well be called the second death, but if we are to be guided by xx. 14, the destruction of the cities of the Plain seems to be in the author's mind. Hort (p. 24) combines the two.

<sup>2</sup> It was till recently the prevalent interpretation. Among more modern expositors who favour it we may mention Bleek (p. 174), Renan (p. 365), Zahn (INT iii. 411, 421), J. Weiss (SNT (p. 101), Hort (pp. 27f.).

the serpent-worship attached to Asclepius." This would give an excellent sense, for the cult would seem to Christians a profane parody of their worship of Jesus the true Healer; while the serpent also was at enmity with the seed of the woman, as indeed he appears elsewhere in the book. And if we dated the letters in the sixties this might be the more tenable interpretation. But if the letters belong to Domitian's time, then the reference is probably to the position accorded to Pergamum as the chief seat of Cæsar worship, which is the dominant fact in the situation which called forth the book. One of their number, Antipas, had been killed in the past; but the catastrophe had not shaken their steadfastness. With reference to the false teachers their record was not so favourable as that of Ephesus; for the church, instead of expelling, was tolerating those who held the teaching of Balaam and the Nicolaitans. They are warned to repent, otherwise Christ will come to them; not in this case to deal with the church itself, but to war against the false teachers with His sharp two-edged sword. The promise to the victor is difficult, "to him will I give of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone and upon the stone a new name written, which no one knoweth but he that receiveth it." The reference to the hidden manna suggests at once the well-known legend (2 Mac. ii. 4-8), so astonishing in its blindness to the significance of the prophet's teaching, that Jeremiah hid the



ark in a cave on Mount Nebo along with the Tabernacle and the altar of incense.<sup>1</sup> It was expected that the Messiah would restore the ark, with the pot of manna preserved in it, and in xi. 19 the Temple of God in heaven is opened and there the Ark of the Covenant is seen. Probably this is the correct explanation, though Hort rejects it and thinks that possibly there may be an allusion to the hiding of the manna in the ark. But the manna was not placed in the ark in order that it might be concealed but that it might be preserved for future generations, "that they may see the bread wherewith I fed you in the wilderness" (Ex. xvi. 32). The contrast here is between the meats offered to idols, which brought those who partook of them into fellowship with demons, and the angels' food, the bread of heaven, of which whosoever eateth shall live for ever. Much more enigmatic is the promise of the white stone with the new and secret name inscribed upon it. Of this there have been many explanations. Probably the passage in the Talmud (*Yoma* 8), which Wetstein has quoted in illustration, telling that precious stones and pearls fell with the manna in the wilderness, is only an

<sup>1</sup> Spitta (p. 123) calls attention also to a comment of Abarbanel on 1 Sam. iv. 4: "This is the ark which Josiah hid before our temple was laid waste, and this ark will be displayed in the time to come at the advent of our Messiah." Here Josiah plays the part attributed in 2 Mac. to Jeremiah. He also quotes on p. 350 a Jewish tradition preserved by Epiphanius, in which Jeremiah is said to have concealed the ark.

interesting coincidence, since it provides no explanation of the new name. Nor does the reference to the Urim and Thummim illuminate the passage. White stones were used by jurors for a verdict of acquittal, so that the term has been explained as a symbol of justification; or again it has been thought to signify a ticket of admission to the heavenly banquet. Ramsay thinks the white pebble has in itself no special significance except that white is the fortunate colour, it is simply the material on which the name is written and chosen for its permanence. This might be intended as a contrast with the more perishable parchment, which in fact takes its name (*Pergamentum*) from Pergamum. All the stress would in that case lie upon the name. Probably, however, the writer is borrowing from contemporary magic. Bousset says: "The white stone with the unknown name is nothing else than an amulet with a powerful magical formula . . . . an amulet with such magical efficacy gives to the pious a complete lordship over all things." Similarly P. Gardner says: "The use of amulets inscribed with mystic words was quite familiar to those who used 'Ephesian letters.'"<sup>1</sup> The contrast is thus with those stones inscribed with mystic formulæ to which "the heathen in his blindness" attributed such power, and the gift of a heavenly talisman inscribed with a new name, a name which was a secret shared by

<sup>1</sup> *The Ephesian Gospel*, p. 47.

the recipient with Christ alone. To us the fulness of meaning is largely lost because names no longer retain their ancient significance. They are for us primarily labels of identification ; but to primitive thought the name was charged with mysterious potency. Not only did it describe the character, it was an integral part of the personality. Whoever knew it had its bearer in his power. It could thus be used as a spell by which benefits might be wrung from the bearer or injury might be inflicted on him. Thus savages will carefully conceal their true names that no enemy may gain control over them ; while a knowledge of the hidden name plays a large part in magic. The main thought here then, expressed by this symbolism borrowed from magic, is presumably the gift of power and dominion. It is further to be observed that the new name is in each case unique. The point is largely missed if this is not emphasized.

The letter to Thyatira is the longest of the seven and this is due to the prominence given to Jezebel the prophetess. Thyatira is described by Ramsay as a weak frontier city, which had to be carefully fortified but could never be made really strong. In times of peace its position gave it great prosperity. He thinks that there may be allusions to the history of the city which are not clear to us owing to the insufficiency of our knowledge. Its natural weakness, he says, stands in striking contrast to the promise of dominion over the nations who are to be

ruled with a rod of iron. The church had obviously been too deeply infected with antinomian teaching. Warm praise is given for its good qualities, but it is censured for its toleration of a false prophetess. She is styled Jezebel, possibly because she actually bore the name, but far more probably for its sinister associations. She was the ringleader of the antinomian movement which countenanced the practice of eating meats offered to idols and impurity ; the latter being literally intended and not, as many think, a mere metaphor for idolatry. She had already been warned and opportunity for repentance had been given ; but she had refused to make use of her respite, so sterner measures will be taken. For the bed of pleasure, the bed of sickness, or it may be the funeral bier, will be substituted and her fate will be shared by her paramours, while her children will be killed with the pestilence. Thus the churches will learn that the Searcher of hearts awards to each his just retribution. And on those who are not contaminated by this moral leprosy and refuse initiation into the deep things of Satan no other burden will be imposed. The reference to the Apostolic Decree of Acts xv. is unmistakable : “ For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things ; that ye abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication ; from which if ye keep yourselves, it shall be well with

you.”<sup>1</sup> Two of these injunctions Jezebel and her associates had set at nought. The phrase “the deep things of Satan” is of great interest. It is often supposed that the words actually used were “the deep things of God,” since it is thought improbable that the false teachers would have described their quest by the language here attributed to them. In that case the author in horror at their tenets and practices sarcastically substitutes Satan for God. More probably, however, this phrase was actually used, possibly in the sense that they must know, if their knowledge and experience are to be complete, not Divine mysteries alone but also diabolical. This would find an excellent parallel in the principles professed at a later time by Carpocrates the Gnostic.<sup>2</sup> Possibly, however,

<sup>1</sup> I quote the generally accepted text, but recognize the strength of the case for the “Western” reading, which omits “things strangled” from the list. If this is correct, the prohibitions may be ethical, and forbid idolatry, murder, and fornication. See G. Resch, *Das Aposteldekret nach seiner ausserkanonischen Textgestalt*; Harnack, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, pp. 188-198 (= *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 248-263); Lake, *Earlier Epistles of St. Paul*, pp. 48-60.

<sup>2</sup> Carpocrates (date perhaps about A.D. 130-150) taught that the whole range of human experience must be traversed by the soul, which became incarnate in a succession of bodies till the full knowledge had been attained. But if all this could be accomplished in a single life-time, this transmigration could be avoided. The principle led straight to the most abandoned forms of vice. To taste of every fruit on the tree of knowledge, to see everything for oneself, is to combine with religious raptures the most revolting vice, impartially to explore the infernal depths and the celestial heights, literally to “know the depths of Satan.”

Zahn may be right in interpreting, "One must acquaint himself with the deep things of Satan,—not, of course, to be engulfed therein, but that he may realize the powerlessness of the world of evil spirits, and attain freedom from evil."<sup>1</sup> In any case the addition of the words "as they say" makes it most unlikely that the author should have changed their phrase and thus laid himself open to the unanswerable retort that he had distorted their language and that they had never said anything of the kind.

Before we leave this topic, a reference must be made to the identification of Jezebel with the prophetess of Sambethe the Chaldean sibyl, or perhaps with the sibyl herself. This, which was first suggested by Blakesley in his article on Thyatira in Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible*,<sup>2</sup> has been defended by Schürer in his learned contribution to the volume published in honour of Weizsäcker.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> INT iii. p. 418.

<sup>2</sup> After quoting evidence to show that "in Thyatira there was a great antagonism of races," he proceeds: "But amalgamation of different races, in pagan nations, always went together with a syncretism of different religions, every relation of life having its religious sanction. If the sibyl Sambatha was really a Jewess, lending her aid to this proceeding, and not discountenanced by the authorities of the Judeo-Christian Church at Thyatira, both the censure and its qualifications became easy of explanation" (p. 1495).

<sup>3</sup> *Die Prophetin Isabel in Thyatira, Theologische Abhandlungen: Carl von Weizsäcker . . . . gewidmet*, (pp. 37-58). Schürer takes her to have been not a Jewess, but a heathen; still he considers it quite possible that she may have been affected by Judaism. He supposes that the Christians who



It has been generally rejected on the ground that Jezebel was obviously a member of the church whose action the church had a claim to control. Had she been a heathen prophetess she might, conceivably have exercised a pernicious influence on some Christians of Thyatira; but the church could not have been blamed for tolerating her with her false teaching and outrageous practice.

To the victor dominion is promised; he is to rule like the Messiah over the nations with a rod of iron and shiver them like a potter's vessel. The additional promise "and I will give him the morning star" is quite obscure. In xxii. 16 Jesus says, "I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright, the morning star." Several interpreters have accordingly inferred that the meaning in the first passage is that Christ will give Himself to the victor. But that can hardly be the sense intended,

hold "the teaching of Balaam," or "the teaching of the Nicolaitans" as it is also called, were probably converts from heathenism, who had previously held the sibyl in honour, and had only half broken with their heathen mode of life. It is needless to say that any work of Schürer's will be learned and instructive, whether its conclusions are accepted or not. His theory is rejected by Bousset, Zahn, C. A. Scott, Ramsay, Swete, Moffatt, Holtzmann-Bauer, J. Weiss (*Off.* p. 52). I do not remember whether it has found any acceptance. The gist of the theory may be conveniently gathered from pp. 56f. of his dissertation; but some readers may be glad of a reference to the masterly summary given by Schürer himself in his review of the volume (TLZ xviii. cols. 153f). He adds a warning at the close of this notice, that he has only called attention to a possibility, and is in no way desirous that it should be accepted as a fact. Apparently the view was put forward quite independently of Blakesley's suggestion.

and it is wiser to recognize that at present we have no satisfactory clue to it.

One of the sternest of the seven letters is that addressed to Sardis. The history of the city may perhaps have guided the choice of some phrases in it.<sup>1</sup> Under Cræsus the city had been magnificent, it seemed impregnable, but Cyrus took it by a night attack at an unguarded point. This experience was repeated under Antiochus the Great. There is thus a pertinence in the command to be watchful and the threat that Christ will come as a thief at an unexpected moment. On its general character that it had a name to live and yet was dead Ramsay says : " No city in the whole province of Asia had a more splendid history in past ages than Sardis. No city of Asia at that time showed such a melancholy contrast between past splendour and present decay as Sardis. Its history was the exact opposite of the record of Smyrna. Smyrna was dead and yet lived. Sardis lived and yet was dead " (p. 375). Bengel suggested that the words " thou hast a name that thou livest and thou art dead " contain a play on the name of the angel. He bore a name which signified that he lived. Bengel took this to be " Zosimus." Zahn follows his view, but prefers to regard the name as " Zotikos," which is better. This interpretation, however, stands or falls with the view that the angel of a church is its bishop which we have seen

<sup>1</sup> Ramsay, *Letters* pp. 354-362, 375-382.

reason to reject. The meaning then is that the Church of Sardis has the reputation of being a living church, whereas it is really dead. It is therefore warned to be watchful and revive such embers of the original fire as still remain. Otherwise the Judge will steal upon them to inflict a sudden vengeance. Yet there are a few even in Sardis with garments undefiled, and so their reward shall be to walk with Christ hereafter in white robes. And this shall be the reward of all the victors, nor shall their names be blotted from the book of life but confessed before the Father and His angels.

The Church of Philadelphia receives unstinted praise. Some of the features of the letter may be illustrated by parallels from the history and the conditions of the city. Ramsay selects the following points as characteristic of Philadelphia:<sup>1</sup> (1) It was a missionary city, the intention of its founder being to make it a centre of Græco-Asiatic civilization, and to spread the Greek language and manners. This lends point to the reference to the open door, which quite agrees with the actual situation of the city. (2) Its people always lived in dread of a disaster, "the day of trial," due to experience of earthquakes; and many in consequence of this went out of the city to dwell. There may be references to these characteristics in the letter, the pillar which is the symbol of stability, the

<sup>1</sup> *Letters* pp. 391-398, 404-412.

promise that the victor shall be shaken by no disaster in the day of trial, and shall never again require to go out and take refuge in the open country. The city which had suffered so much and so long from instability is to be rewarded with the Divine firmness and steadfastness. (3) It took a new name Neokaisareia, that is city of the new Cæsar, and called itself the city of its imperial god present on earth to help it. This gives point to the words, "I will write upon him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the New Jerusalem which cometh down out of heaven from my God, and mine own new name." These local allusions may not all have been intended but some at least are probable. The church at Philadelphia has seized its opportunity for missionary service. It is meeting with opposition from the Jews, the synagogue of Satan, who will be forced to come cringing to her feet and acknowledge that she is the beloved of God. She will be preserved in the hour of trial which will soon be passed, for Christ will return quickly, so she must hold fast what she already possesses that no one may take her crown. The victor will be a pillar in the temple of God bearing the name of God, of the New Jerusalem and Christ's own new name.

In the letter to Laodicea, the sternest of all, local allusions have often been observed. The city had been destroyed by an earthquake in A.D. 60; it was rebuilt by the inhabitants without help from

imperial funds. This gives point to the words "I am rich and have gotten riches and have need of nothing." Its sheep produced a famous wool of glossy black and it carried on a great trade in clothing manufactured from it; in contrast to this the Laodiceans are counselled to buy of Christ white garments. So the words, "I counsel thee to buy of me gold refined by fire," may gain additional meaning from the fact that the city was a great banking centre. There was a tabloid made in Phrygia and probably especially at Laodicea which was used for curing the eyes. The word translated "eye-salve," which refers rather to the shape in which the tablets were made up, is probably an allusion to this. It is especially the lukewarmness of the church which rouses the seer's indignation. And not unjustly, for though a measure of warmth may seem preferable to coldness, yet it is not really so, since it points to a fundamental flaw in the nature. There is more hope of the man who has decision and downrightness of character, even though its direction is evil, than of the man who is nothing with any thoroughness or whole-heartedness. And along with the tepid character of its religion goes a blind self-complacency. In her own eyes she is rich and well-furnished with all she needs, but she is all the while poor and wretched and naked. Hence Christ rejects her with nausea, nor indeed is there any hope for her unless she comes to Him for heavenly treasure to make her rich, for

white garments that she may be clad, and ointment to cure her blindness. The severity of tone is the severity of love. Christ is knocking at the door, let Him not find His servants too deeply sunk in slumber to hear His voice, but wakeful that they may let Him in and share with Him the heavenly feast. To the victor is promised that he shall sit with Christ on His throne as He had overcome and sat down on the throne of His Father.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The letter to Laodicea closes with the end of the chapter, not earlier. Ramsay (*Letters* pp. 431f.) argues that the closing verses (probably 19-22) constitute an epilogue to the whole of the seven letters. But this seems impossible. It spoils the symmetry of this letter, leaving it a torso and destroying its correspondence with the other letters, which close in a form similar to 21f. And the exhortation in 19 is exactly suited to a lukewarm church.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### God's in His Heaven.

WITH the fourth chapter the vision proper begins, but this and the succeeding chapter are really occupied with preliminary descriptions. The seer looks skyward and sees a door open in heaven. He hears the trumpet tones of Christ bidding him enter that He may show him the things which are to come to pass hereafter. At once he is in an ecstasy. This has created difficulties, since he was in the Spirit when Christ first appeared to him, and there has been no indication that the trance had ceased, or that the existing rapture was now intensified.<sup>1</sup> But probably this is intended, for he passes now from earth to heaven, and the ecstasy is naturally heightened with the change. Transported to heaven, he sees a throne whereon God sits. His appearance was of a dazzling brightness like the opal and cornelian, and round the throne was a

<sup>1</sup> Vischer p. 77. See on the other hand Gunkel, *Die Wirkungen des heiligen Geistes*,<sup>1</sup> p. 33 (p. 30 in second edition).

halo, in form like a rainbow and green in colour as the emerald to temper the radiance.<sup>1</sup> Ranged round the supreme throne are four and twenty other thrones whereon four and twenty elders sit, clad in white robes. He sees flashes of lightning darting from the throne and he hears the thunders peal. Before it seven lamps of fire are burning, identified with the seven Spirits of God, those Spirits already associated in the author's benediction on the seven churches from God and Christ. Stretching before the throne was a glassy sea like crystal for clearness. Four living creatures are said to be in the midst of the throne and round about the throne. These are the cherubim, who in the Old Testament are the throne-bearers of God. Here they fulfil the same function. In recumbent posture they bear the throne on the back part of their bodies, while the front part of their bodies projects beyond it.<sup>2</sup> The description has been influenced by the vision of Ezekiel (i. 5-25), but two traits have been added from Isaiah's description of the seraphim, for each of them has six wings and it is their task to utter the praise of God's holiness (Isa. vi. 2f.). And as they do this, the four and twenty elders do homage to Him that is on the throne. They renounce their royal state before

<sup>1</sup> "As Pliny says, H.N. xxxvii. 5, that when the eyes are blinded by any other sight, that of the emerald restores them again" (Bleek p. 198).

<sup>2</sup> This is perhaps the best explanation of the difficult phrase "in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne."

Him and praise Him for the work He has achieved in creation.

Who then are these four and twenty elders? They seem to be kings rather than priests, for they wear golden crowns and sit upon thrones. Many views have been expressed as to their real character. A very common belief has been that they represent the Church, the whole Israel of God, both of the old and the new dispensations, the Jewish Church being represented by the twelve patriarchs, the Christian by the twelve apostles. Such evidence as we possess, however, and intrinsic probability point rather to the view that they are angels, corresponding to the "thrones" mentioned in the Epistle to the Colossians (i. 16). Indeed it is not unlikely that, as Gunkel argues,<sup>1</sup> we should recognize a mythological basis for the idea. He thinks that the twenty-four elders were originally gods who, according to Babylonian mythology, belonged to the heavenly Council. God is the "King of kings," and the kings over whom He reigns were themselves at first regarded as Divine beings rather than as earthly kings. Originally they may have been twenty-four star-gods grouped in a circle round the pole-star, each a ruler of one of the twenty-four sections into which the Zodiac was divided. These star-gods are called "judges of the universe." Such a conception was of course impossible in a monotheistic religion like Judaism, so in it they

<sup>1</sup> SC pp. 302-308, RVNT pp. 42f.

naturally sank to the position of angels. Thus while they wear crowns and so are seen to be properly kings, they cast their crowns at the feet of God. Whether this suggestion as to their original character is correct or no, the author possesses no consciousness of it but regards them simply as angels of the highest order.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### The Book with Seven Seals.

WHILE the fourth chapter fixes our attention on the Almighty enthroned above the flood, the Lord of Nature and the controller of History, the fifth chapter introduces the figure of the Lamb and the thought of redemption. Yet here also God is seated on His throne and it is on His hand that the book with seven seals is displayed. The character and form of the book are alike obscure. It is not clear whether it was a roll or a book. That it lies on the hand does not necessarily imply that it could not have been a roll. Nor are either text or translation certain.<sup>1</sup> The meaning

<sup>1</sup> Bousset<sup>1</sup> prefers to read "a book written within and without," but the critical editors read "a book written within and on the back," so also Swete and Moffatt. Bousset accepts this in his second edition. Zahn says that this is the only correct reading, but he connects differently, "a book written within, and close sealed on the back with seven seals" (INT iii. pp. 405f.). He rejects the view that there was writing on the back; but probably incorrectly. Such documents were not uncommon, and there was a technical name for them (*ὑπισθύγραφον*). J. Weiss agrees with Zahn.

seems to be that the book is so crowded with writing that not only is the inside of it full but the writing has had to be continued upon the back. More important is the problem as to the nature of the book. The more usual view is that it is the scroll of destiny in which the secrets of the future are written. Then the question arises as to the sealing, whether with the breaking of the seals the contents are progressively disclosed, so that as each is broken a further portion of the book can be read, or whether all have to be broken before the book can be read at all. If the book is the scroll of destiny the former view seems preferable. Yet obviously this creates difficulties, though it would be quite possible to construct a roll which with the breaking of each seal should open so as to let a little more of the writing be read.<sup>1</sup> But Huschke,<sup>2</sup> who is followed by Zahn,<sup>3</sup> J. Weiss,<sup>4</sup> and Clemen,<sup>5</sup> has argued that the contemporaries of the author would at once understand that the book was a testament. He says: "If at that time anyone in the Roman Empire had been asked what is a booklet sealed with seven seals and written

<sup>1</sup> J. Weiss mentions (*Off.* p. 57) that his colleague R. Knopf had very ingeniously constructed such a roll.

<sup>2</sup> pp. 15ff.

<sup>3</sup> INT iii. pp. 354-396, 406.

<sup>4</sup> *Off.* pp. 58f.

<sup>5</sup> PCNS p. 124. Selwyn also accepts this view (p. 130); but his statement that the book "is now generally admitted to be a testament" is quite unwarranted. He refers to E. Hicks, *Greek Philosophy and Roman Law in the Christian Church*.



within and without? he would have answered without hesitation: the universally known *testatio* or attested document." It had become customary, he tells us, when certified documents such as transcripts or affidavits had to be prepared, for seven Roman citizens who were of age to be taken as witnesses. The document was written on the two inner pages of a double tablet. The tablet was then closed and fastened with a thread that was drawn through several holes which were made on the outer edges. The thread was finally drawn through the middle hole and then at the end of it in the centre of the outer side of the upper tablet the witnesses placed their seals and wrote their names against them. The outer side of the upper tablet did not remain empty but was used for a transcription of the document, which might in several instances be taken as sufficient evidence, but in cases where full proof was required could not, since it was exposed to forgery, suffice without comparison with the document itself. For this purpose the prætor or other magistrate summoned the witnesses, or if they had already spontaneously appeared, simply called upon them to identify the seals which they had placed on the document and examine whether the thread had been tampered with. The document was then opened by the breaking of the seals and read out. In the case of written wills, whose contents had naturally to be kept private, the oral ratification of the testator,

which was all that the witnesses had strictly to certify, was written on the outside of the document alongside of the seals of the witnesses.

Huschke's opinion, propounded by a writer who was at once jurist and theologian, and approved by such eminent New Testament scholars, of course deserves careful consideration. But the right starting-point for determining the question is not to ask what a book written within and on the back and sealed with seven seals would suggest to the ordinary person. It is a mistake to apply a different criterion to this set of seven from that applied to the other sets, the seven trumpets, the seven bowls, or the seven thunders. Accordingly it need be no more than a coincidence that legal documents were also sealed with seven seals. And this is all the more probable since we have no reference to the presence of witnesses and their identification of their seals and signatures. The only question that can properly be raised is, Which of the two interpretations gives the more suitable sense?

If the book is a testament the significance of the breaking of the seals is that this is necessary before the will can be executed; only when they had been broken could the book be opened and read, and the breaking of them one by one is an indispensable preliminary to its being carried into effect. A will implies an inheritance, hence its execution means that the saints will enter on their inheritance and the Kingdom of God will come. The point of the

sealing is in that case not so much that the contents of the book are unknown as that they still await realization. The breaking of each seal brings the end a step nearer, the breaking of the six seals is followed by the triumph of the Gospel and the plagues (the woes of the Messiah), that of the seventh is not followed by a plague but by silence in heaven, that is according to Zahn the Sabbath-rest of God, according to J. Weiss the end itself.

The more usual view, however, is that the book is the scroll of destiny.<sup>1</sup> In that case the thought is that the breaking of the seals discloses the secrets of the future and if the book cannot be opened and read the future will remain unknown. It would seem at first sight as if the interpretation of the book as a testament gave a worthier meaning to the seer's grief when he learns that no one has been found qualified to open the book. For the disaster that is then threatened is that the will can never be executed and thus the heirs cannot enter on their inheritance. In other words the long-promised Kingdom of God, to which the seer looks forward so passionately, will not come at all. His sorrow then, it may be urged, is not that of personal disappointment; it is for the catastrophe which affects the whole Church. But if he weeps because it seems as if the promise made to him "Come up hither, and I will shew thee the things which must

<sup>1</sup> Gunkel's view that it is a book of magic (RVNT pp. 60-63) has not, so far as I have observed, met with acceptance.

come to pass hereafter" is to remain unfulfilled, it is not because his private curiosity is to be ungratified but because the knowledge he hoped to receive as a sacred trust would be withheld from the Church. Probably the usual interpretation that the book is the scroll of destiny is the more correct. For with the breaking of the seals the action of the drama progresses. The things written in the book are not indeed read out by the Lamb, but they are expressed in an even more effective and picturesque form by the scene which follows. We are to understand that the plagues were written in the book, but they passed before the eye as *tableaux vivants* rather than fell upon the ear as oral description. If on the other hand the book is a testament, its contents cannot be disclosed till the seventh seal is broken. We should then anticipate that after the seventh seal was broken the book should be read. But since this is not the case we may assume with great probability that the book is not a will at all. We can now turn to consider the scene itself in more detail.

The seer beholds the book poised on the hand of God. It lies free for anyone who is qualified to take it;<sup>1</sup> it is not clenched tight in God's hand, for who would venture to wrest it from Omnipotence against His will? A strong angel herald proclaims

<sup>1</sup> Zahn (p. 405) infers from the statement that it lies on the hand of God that it is not a roll; but even J. Weiss dissents from him at this point (p. 57).

with a mighty voice, which sounds through all the vast universe, the challenge to whoever may be worthy to loose the seals and open the book. But no one responds, for no angel in heaven, no inhabitant of earth or the underworld, is found able to open the book or even to gaze upon it. The seer weeps much in the bitterness of his disappointment that the promise made to him that the secrets of the future would be disclosed is to remain unfulfilled. Then one of the four and twenty elders bids him refrain from weeping, since the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David has overcome to open the book and its seven seals. Two qualifications are required which anyone must satisfy who would venture to take the book. He must have overcome in conflict, and he must possess not only the strength of vision to look on the book with undazzled eyes, but insight to decipher its strange mystic characters. So the description which the elder gives of the champion, who has succeeded where all others have failed, is quite what we should expect. He is the lion-like hero of Judah, that lion-like tribe (Gen. xlix. 9), in whom its qualities of strength and courage are concentrated. He is the Messianic warrior whose victory over all the forces of heathenism had been foretold by the prophets. Moreover His tribe had been pre-eminently the tribe of revelation ; there rests upon Him not only the spirit of might but the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and of knowledge

(Isa. xi. 2). A prophet so endowed might naturally be qualified as no other to penetrate the secrets of the future. With such strength and wisdom it was fitting that He should have won the right to take and open the book. But the deepest significance of the scene lies in the dramatic surprise that follows. For when the seer looks again, he sees a new figure which he has not beheld before—a new figure, but not the figure we should expect him to see. For when he looks to see the victorious lion standing triumphant over His prey, His foot crushing His prostrate victim and His mouth ruddy with its blood what he sees is a Lamb standing as if it had been slain.<sup>1</sup>

It would hardly be possible to put the contrast between the Old Testament and the New in a more incisive and striking form. For the Israelites, though in the highest exponents of their religion they rose above it, yet for the most part remained here too much on the level of the surrounding peoples. They linked right and might too closely together, prosperity was the appointed reward of

<sup>1</sup> It is possible that a mythological background may be detected. It is, indeed, no ordinary Lamb, who is depicted "with seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God." Perhaps there may be a suggestion of a ram as well as of a Lamb, and the writer may think of the sun—weak as it passes through the sign of the ram and strong as it reaches the sign of the lion. But, even if this were the case it makes no difference to the real significance of the scene; and for my own part I see no reason at all at this point for invoking a mythological origin where a much less remote combination lay ready to the author's hand. See Clemens, *FCNS* pp. 104f.



goodness, and suffering the expression of the Divine displeasure at sin. Hence the Messiah was an invincible warrior who, if He reigned as Prince of Peace, had reached His throne through victory in battle, henceforth to rule the nations with a rod of iron or shiver them like a potter's vessel. The heathen were worthy only of His trampling, fit fuel for the fire of His wrath.

But the Gospel came into the world with new words upon its lips. For till then men had counted those as truly blessed who were rich and powerful and set on high. The strong were the justly fortunate, while the weak went to the wall. But Christianity struck a new note, "Blessed are the poor," "Blessed are the meek," "Blessed are the hungry," "Blessed the persecuted and despised." It created new standards of value. Hence instead of a Messiah who triumphs because He has crushed His enemies into submission by sheer power, we have a Messiah who is the embodiment of gentleness and meekness, and the victory He achieves is accomplished through suffering and death. By this death He has purchased for Himself a people to be unto God a kingdom and priests. We can hardly emphasise too much the deep insight which the author thus displays into the essence of Christianity. Nor can we fail to notice how, with all the Judaism which characterises the Book, he rises here clear above its limitations, alike in the quality of his ideal and his glorious universalism

which brings within the sweep of redemption every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.

But the Lamb has triumphed not in right of conquest alone, but in virtue of insight. That indeed is clear from His choice of this path to victory. For while others have sought to reach their goal by force and violence and aggression, He has gone beneath their superficial view and grasped the deep paradox that victory comes through suffering, submission, and self-surrender. And therefore,

“He was oppressed, yet He humbled Himself,  
And opened not His mouth,  
As a lamb that is led to the slaughter,  
And as a sheep before its shearers is dumb.”

And thus He is able to divine the future because He has discovered the principle which controls it. In His own action He has made Himself one with the stream of the Divine purpose and the method of the Divine government. Therefore He is able not simply to break the seals but to decipher and reveal the contents of the scroll.

The seer has already heard the song of creation, but now the elders and the cherubim are able to sing a new song, the song of redemption. And how different it is! It is a new song, and a wholly new enthusiasm pervades it. And when the four living creatures and elders have sung their song, the strain is taken up by the innumerable multitude of angels, ten thousand times ten thousand and

thousands of thousands, with their seven-fold doxology to the Lamb that hath been slain. Then in the four-fold doxology to Him that sitteth on the throne and to the Lamb, not cherubim and elders and angels alone, but all created things throughout the vast spaces of the universe unite. The first scene which culminates in the chant of creation is sublime, but it leaves us cold ; the second throbs with the passionate love of one who knows that he owes his redemption to the sacrifice of the Lamb and from whose own lips at the opening of the book springs the irrepressible praise, the thrilling and rapturous expression of devotion, which interrupts the development of his theme (Rev. i. 5).

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## CHAPTER XV.

### The Breaking of the Seals.

AFTER the Lamb had taken the book and the praises of the universe had been offered to Him, He began to open the seals. The number of the seals that He broke is fixed as seven by the number of seals on the book, hence if there is a reason for regarding any element as not original, that will not affect the original number of the seals. It would not be a case of addition but of substitution of one for another. Again, the seals fall clearly into two groups, the first four and the last three. The number of the first four seals is guaranteed by that of the four living creatures, each of whom utters the word "Come" to one of the four riders. The question arises with reference to the first four whether any change has taken place. According to a widely accepted view the first two riders represent war; so that they look like doubles of each other. On the other hand in the fourth seal we have really two riders and not one, viz., Death and Hades. Originally death may have been used, as it often is, in the sense of pestilence (cf. the Black Death), as

indeed it is in the latter part of the verse. In that case Hades might represent death in the usual sense of the term. If then the first four seals stood for war, famine, pestilence, death, we should have to infer that the writer made the four riders into five by inserting the figure of the first horseman, but since the number of these seals could not exceed four was compelled to put pestilence and death together under one seal. This ingenious reconstruction which was suggested by J. Weiss<sup>1</sup> is perhaps corroborated by the bow at present attributed to the first horseman but sometimes associated with pestilence. In that case the author has taken the traditional apocalyptic series of plagues and added the first as his own contribution.

This view is attractive but open to criticism. What is really strange is rather that death in the strict sense of the term should be associated with particular modes of death. Accordingly if the passage has been altered, it might be preferable to assume that the figure of Hades has been added together with the reference to the different modes of death in 8b. In that case we should take the rider on the livid horse to be Death in the sense of pestilence. This leaves us War, Famine, Pestilence, as the riders on the red, the black and the pale horses respectively. The problem of the first rider remains. Since in xix. 11, when heaven is opened, Christ comes forth to make war, seated on

<sup>1</sup> *Off.* pp. 59-62.

a white horse, many interpreters have identified the first rider with Him. It is not impossible that Christ, who opens the seal which is the signal for the rider to appear, should Himself be the rider who obeys the summons. It is, however, most improbable in itself. Moreover it brings Him on the scene much too early ; for it is not till a very late point in the development that He enters on His victorious career. This identification should therefore be set aside without hesitation. More consideration is due to the suggestion that the first rider represents the victorious progress of the Gospel. This recognizes the points of contact with the rider of xix. 11. In both cases he sits on a white horse. The rider in our passage receives a crown, while on the head of Him that is Faithful and True there are many diadems. The Gospel is God's word, Christ also is called the Word of God. Moreover in the eschatological discourse of Jesus (Mark xiii. 7-10), on which the present passage may be based, we have the series war, earthquake, famine. These things are the beginning of travail. Then we are told that "the gospel must first be preached unto all the nations." Here accordingly the world-wide preaching of the Gospel precedes the beginning of travail (the woes of the Messiah), the birth pangs of the Messianic age.

Yet against this view there are objections. It is questionable whether there is any relationship between the eschatological discourse in the Gospels



and our passage. Pestilence is not mentioned in the former, and earthquake which comes in its place here appears in the sixth seal. The sequence of the second, third and fourth seals is quite natural, and we do not even need to explain it by recourse to an eschatological tradition. War breeds famine and famine pestilence. Further there is a presumption that the first four seals are of the same character. The breaking of them unchains a series of calamities. If so, the first rider must represent some form of war. It is undeniably strange that two seals should each express the same thing. But there is a significant difference. To the first rider a bow is given, to the second a great sword.

It is a mistake in method, when we are dealing with a conventional apocalyptic series, to suppose that each member of it must answer to some situation in contemporary history. Wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, tornadoes are far too frequent in history, too constant a feature in apocalyptic forecasts, to permit us to insist that the seer must have had some definite catastrophe in his mind. But the presence of specific features may justify us in finding definite allusions. At the time when the book was written, a reference to the triumphant career of Rome as something still in the future would have been out of place. Moreover there is no reason why the rider should have received a bow. But this feature suits the Parthians who were famous archers, whose arrows indeed have

passed into a proverb. The anticipation of a Parthian invasion of the Empire is elsewhere prominent in the Book. Accordingly it is likely that the identification of the first rider with the Parthians should be accepted.

The second seal represents war, possibly waged by the Roman sword, but there is no need to think of anything so definite in this case. The third seal represents famine, again with a possible historical allusion to the repeal of Domitian's edict.<sup>1</sup> The fourth probably represents pestilence.

The fifth seal seems strange in this series, for whereas the breaking of the first four seals and the sixth launches calamity after calamity on the world, the breaking of the fifth brings before the seer's eye the souls of the martyrs under the altar. He hears their impassioned cry for vengeance, he sees a white robe given to each and they are told to rest till the tale of martyrs is complete. Clearly there lies behind this vision a terrible persecution, probably that of Nero, while another persecution is anticipated, presumably that of the last emperor, which is soon to come and after which the cry for vengeance is to be satisfied. Persecutions were predicted in the eschatological discourse of Jesus; they are therefore appropriately included in this series. The impatience of the martyrs for revenge on their persecutors cannot at once be gratified, the time at which the persecution is to cease has been

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 90-92.

fixed and it has not yet expired, nor has the number of those destined to martyrdom as yet been reached. But they are quieted with the assurance that the interval is but brief and then the martyrs will be avenged. Meanwhile a white robe is given to them. The significance of this is uncertain but it may be the heavenly body, apart from which they are naked souls (2 Cor. v. 2f.). Their time of waiting is thus eased by the granting of a foretaste of their final state.

The opening of the sixth seal brings with it an earthquake of appalling violence, eclipse of sun and moon, the rolling up of the sky, so that the stars fall from it.<sup>1</sup> With this we have the climax of the judgments, whereas in Mark the earthquake comes earlier in the series. Its position here is due to its exceptional violence. In view of the terms in which it is described it is not strange that many regard it as a description of the Last Day. Undeniably the consternation of those who seek to hide themselves from the face of their Judge and the language in which their dismay finds utterance, prove that they believed the end to have come; but this cannot settle the question whether the seer himself shared and meant to convey that impression. The Old Testament parallels warn us that we may have to do with poetical exaggeration, and that though the earthquake is really terrible it does not usher in the end. Obviously there is poetic exaggeration in the

<sup>1</sup> On the view of the universe implied see pp. 180-183.

passage, as the inconsistency of *vv.* 15f. with *vv.* 13f., which arises if the language is taken literally, clearly proves. The question, however, is part of the wider issue as to the relation in which the seals, the trumpets and the bowls stand to each other.<sup>1</sup> If the trumpets and the bowls simply go over the period already covered by the seals then the sixth seal may very well stand for the Judgment Day. But if they carry forward the action, then the sixth seal must stand some distance from the end.

<sup>1</sup> On this problem see pp. 176-178.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### The Hundred and Forty-four Thousand and the Innumerable Multitude.

**I**T is remarkable that after the sixth seal the breaking of the seventh seal does not follow, two parenthetical visions being here interpolated. The first of these brings before us four angels who stand at the four corners of the earth holding the four winds in leash. These winds, if released, would lash the sea into fury and blast vegetation, and uproot the trees. Another angel forbids them to let loose the winds until he and his helpers have sealed the servants of God on the forehead. Presumably we have before us a fragment of what once was more complete, for the four angels play no further part, nor do we read that the winds are unchained when the sealing has been effected. Nor is any account given of the sealing; the seer simply learns the number of those who have been thus protected. Probably an earlier source lies behind this section either written or handed down orally in the tradition. A Jewish or Jewish Christian author, if it is with a literary source we

have to do, represented a hundred and forty-four thousand Israelites as preserved in the days of tribulation. It is a small proportion of the total number of Israelites. Hence J. Weiss thinks that the standpoint of Jewish Christianity is here represented, which regarded the Jewish people as having lost a right to the honoured name of Israelite, but anticipated that a remnant of the people would become Christians. Yet the doctrine of the remnant was familiar to the prophets, and Bousset may be right in thinking that the original reference was to the opposition offered to Antichrist by a faithful remnant and its preservation.

This fragment has been incorporated by the author and we must ask what meaning he put upon it. It is thought by several that the hundred and forty-four thousand are to be identified with the innumerable multitude. In that case the Christians are represented under the familiar symbol of the true Israel. In favour of this is the fact that in xiv. 1-5 we read of a hundred and forty-four thousand who bear on their foreheads the name of God and the name of the Lamb, who follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. But the differences are too marked for us to have any confidence in the identification of the hundred and forty-four thousand sealed out of every tribe and the hundred and forty-four thousand companion; of the Lamb. And still more striking are the differences between the hundred and forty-four thousand and the



multitude which no man can number. There is a marked contrast between the definite number in the one case and the multitude beyond possibility of counting in the other, and similarly between the Israelites of every tribe and the multitude from every nation. Those sealed are upon earth, the multitude are before the throne of God in Heaven. We should therefore take the hundred and forty-four thousand as the Christian element of the Jewish race, twelve thousand being sealed from each tribe. That the twelve tribes were still in existence and would participate in the glories of Israel's restoration was the belief and hope of the Jews.

The enumeration of the tribes presents curious features. Judah, the tribe from which Jesus sprang, naturally comes first; Reuben is associated with him since he was actually the eldest; Gad and Asher, Simeon and Levi, Issachar and Zebulun are paired here as elsewhere. Joseph and Benjamin come in their right place at the end. It is *thought* by some that the inclusion of Levi is strange; but the author's list is not based on the list of tribes to which territory was allotted. He follows rather the record of Jacob's sons. Hence he speaks of Joseph, and by bracketing him with Benjamin shows that he means the whole house of Joseph. But the list as it stands can hardly be correct. The order in which the names occur is strange. Simeon and Levi should naturally follow Judah and Reuben. Dr. G. B. Gray has suggested that verses 7 and 8

should be placed before the last clause of verse 5. In that case we should get first the six Leah tribes, then the two Rachel tribes, then the two sons of Zilpah. We should then have as the concluding pair Naphtali and Manasseh, that is the second son of Bilhah paired with the elder son of Joseph. But this is certainly most extraordinary. We are explicitly told that twelve thousand were sealed out of every tribe of Israel. It is astonishing, when we read the list, to find that this is not the case, for the tribe of Dan is omitted. The reason for this self-contradiction is variously given. The most plausible suggestion is that Dan was the tribe from which the Antichrist was expected to spring. It is far more probable however that those scholars are right who think that Dan was in the original list, standing where Manasseh stands now. It has already been pointed out that, on the principle followed in the list, Joseph must be taken strictly as the son of Jacob and full brother of Benjamin, and not as a mere name for Ephraim. In that case Joseph includes Manasseh and there is no room for the latter elsewhere in the list. Further in every other instance the tribes fall into pairs, but Naphtali and Manasseh are a very ill-assorted pair. Naphtali and Dan, however, are properly paired together as the two sons of Bilhah, though mentioned in the reverse order of birth. If this correction is made, then the list becomes symmetrical and it is closed in its reconstructed form by the two sons of the

junior concubine. Nor is the alteration difficult to explain. It was presumably the mere blunder of a copyist who misread Dan as Man and wrote it so, while a subsequent copyist, taking it as an abbreviation for Manasseh, wrote the name in full. In its original form we may conclude then that the list read: Judah, Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, Benjamin, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Dan, the principles on which it was constructed being to place first the six sons of the elder sister, then the two sons of the younger, followed by the sons of their handmaids in the same order.

While the Christian remnant of the Hebrew race is sealed against the troubles which are to be let loose upon the world, the seer beholds an innumerable multitude before the throne, triumphant and victorious. This scene still lies in the future, for the great tribulation, the period of agony, has not yet opened; though the clouds are gathering which indicate that the storm of persecution is soon to burst upon the Church. The Gentile Christians throughout the world will be exposed to its fury and an innumerable host of martyrs will pass through the supreme trial to the rapture and refreshment of heaven. Yet it is not through their own heroism in the conflict that they have won the right to their white garments; they owe it to the redemption achieved by the Lamb, through which they have cleansed their robes and made them white.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### The First Six Trumpets.

THE opening of the seventh seal is followed by silence in heaven for half an hour. The significance of this silence has been variously interpreted; but the suggestion of Dr. Charles<sup>1</sup> that the second verse has been misplaced brings the silence into close connexion with the presentation of the prayers of the saints. The meaning is then that all the praises of heaven are hushed in order that the prayers of the saints may be heard by God. To these prayers on the golden altar an angel<sup>2</sup> adds much incense that they may thus be made acceptable to God. In a sense the scene is parallel to what happens at the opening of the fifth seal. Here too prayers go up to God, presumably with the same burden, the cry that God should avenge His own elect. These prayers, rendered more efficacious by the incense, bring the judgment nearer, and the casting of the fire of the altar upon the earth, which is followed by thunder and lightning and an earthquake, suggests that the final judgment

<sup>1</sup> *Studies*, pp. 152-157.

<sup>2</sup> On the identification of this angel see Charles, *Studies*, pp. 158-161.

is about to break. It is scarcely the climax of the plagues which we have before us, for it is far less impressive than the appalling earthquake which follows the opening of the sixth seal. And certainly it seems astonishing that just when we are expecting the Day of Doom, the action takes a new start and seven trumpets follow. It is accordingly remarkable that at the very point where some final catastrophe is anticipated very little happens. The opening of the seventh seal appears to effect very little. If, however, the seventh seal contains the seven trumpets in itself, this difficulty disappears. The judgment which follows the opening of the final seal embraces all that follows from the sounding of the seven trumpets.

The seven trumpets like the seven seals fall into two groups, the first four and the last three. The last three are apparently identified with the three Woes, and there is a striking difference between the two groups. The first four are briefly described and their action is usually limited to a third part of the persons or objects affected. The fifth and sixth trumpets are of a far more elaborate character and less conventional. They may be bizarre, but they are unquestionably impressive. The seventh trumpet is not followed by any plague of a similar character, but the world has now become God's world. God has taken His power and His throne, and judgment has been executed. The ark is seen

in the heavenly temple and elemental phenomena follow, as after the casting of fire upon the earth. Moreover, as in the case of the seals, various episodes are interpolated between the sixth and the seventh trumpets.

J. Weiss has suggested that the first four trumpets are of a secondary character.<sup>1</sup> Originally there were three Woes. These were later expanded to seven trumpets in order to secure symmetry with the seals and the bowls. Charles independently reached the same conclusion,<sup>2</sup> which may be correct, though the suggestion cannot be more than hypothetical. The first four trumpets are apparently based on volcanic phenomena. These were quite commonly employed in prophetic descriptions of judgment. But the whole district was subject to volcanic disturbances, and those connected with the island of Santorin or Thera in particular may have suggested some features in the description. There are points of contact also with the plagues of Egypt. The judgments are all inflicted on Nature. The earth, the sea, the rivers and fountains, the heavenly

<sup>1</sup> *Off.* pp. 74-76. That the first four trumpets are tame and conventional and marked by weakened repetition as compared with the seals is not entirely correct; the hurling of the burning mass into the sea, and the falling of the star Wormwood, are in themselves highly effective, though less so in their results.

<sup>2</sup> *Studies*, pp. 146-151. He takes the sealing as intended to protect against demonic plagues, and this, while quite suitable to the fifth and sixth trumpets with their demon locusts and demon cavalry, is unsuited to the physical plagues of the first four trumpets.



bodies are smitten. The principle that one-third is affected is carried out with mechanical regularity except at certain points. All the green grass is burnt up and not merely one-third, and many men die of the waters poisoned by the star Wormwood, presumably because in the account of the sixth trumpet we are told that the third part of men was killed by the triple plague. One curious point is that the darkening of one-third of the sun the moon and the stars leads, not as we should have anticipated, to a diminution in the intensity of the light, but to a reduction in the period of shining to two-thirds of the normal duration. It is as if these luminaries were regarded as lamps which had to be daily replenished and because one-third of the illuminating power was subtracted burnt out more rapidly. Another point of interest is that when the sea is turned into blood by the falling into it of the great mountainous fiery mass, not only is death inflicted on one-third of the creatures in the sea but a third part of the ships is destroyed.

The fifth trumpet is of a far more impressive and distinctive character. The seer beholds on earth a star which has fallen from heaven. The stars were commonly regarded as personal beings, hence it would occasion no surprise to the reader that there should be given to this star the key of the pit of the abyss. The pit is the shaft leading to the nether deep, and over it there is a covering, securely locked that the powers of the abyss may not invade

the upper world. Now the star unlocks and removes the covering, and at once there pours out a dense volume of smoke which darkens the air and obscures the sun. The smoke conceals within it a vast swarm of locusts, but these are not the familiar locusts that strip the country bare of all vegetation. They are not to hurt the grass or any green vegetation, or any tree. Men are to be the objects of their attack, such men as have not the seal of God on their foreheads. They have stings like the stings of scorpions with which they inflict an intolerable but not fatal agony, so intolerable that the victims would gladly die rather than suffer it, but death eludes them. The description is partly modelled on that given by Joel ; but the prophet meant locusts in the strict sense of the term. His language, it is true, takes on a tone of exaggeration ; but he is not thinking of supernatural locusts nor yet are we entitled to interpret his words as an allegory. In our passage it is with demon locusts that we have to do, weird denizens of the underworld, sufficiently resembling locusts in general appearance to bear their name, yet differentiated from them in that they spare vegetation and assail men, and by their golden crowns, their human faces, long hair like the hair of women, and scorpion stings. Moreover while a writer in Proverbs (xxx. 27) expressly observes that the locusts have no king, these locusts have as their king Abaddon, or to use the Greek equivalent of

the Hebrew name, Apollyon. The period of torment lasts five months as in the case of an ordinary plague of locusts. So multitudinous are they that the rustling of their wings sounds like chariots or the rushing of many horses to the fray.

The sixth trumpet is supposed by very many to refer to an invasion by the Parthians, since the angels are bound at the Euphrates, and their release sets the armies in motion. But it is clear that we have to do with hosts of demon warriors. Their relation to the Parthians resembles that of the demon locusts to ordinary locusts. The writer may start from the Parthians in his description and borrow some features from them, but mythological traits have been added. The horses are like fire-breathing dragons, their heads are as the heads of lions, their tails are writhing serpents with heads whose bite is death. And the immense number, two hundred millions, suggests that it is with superhuman powers that we have to do. All the destruction is apparently wrought by the horses themselves, not by the horsemen. But the angels are also described as doing what the horses do, killing the third part of men. The connexion between the angels and the hosts is not made clear. We may suppose that the writer means that they are the leaders. Iselin called attention to a passage in the Syriac Apocalypse of Ezra which presents a striking parallel, "And a voice was heard: Let these four kings be released who are bound at the

great river Euphrates who shall destroy a third part of men. And they were released and there was great raging." The resemblance is very striking, but while our passage speaks of four angels, the parallel passage speaks of four kings. Iselin argued that in the Hebrew original the Apocalypse read "kings," which the translator misread as the very similar word "angels."<sup>1</sup> This ingenious suggestion requires the assumption that this part of the Apocalypse has been translated from Hebrew. Spitta reads "the companies" for "the angels,"<sup>2</sup> but the idea of four companies of horsemen, and such horsemen, each consisting of fifty millions, as bound at the Euphrates is highly improbable. Some tradition may lie behind this vision; possibly it is, as Bousset suggests, a late variant of that which appears in its original form in vii. 1. There the four angels are at the four corners of the earth, here the anticipation of a Parthian invasion may have localised them at the Euphrates. Although one-third of mankind was killed with the three plagues of fire, smoke and brimstone, proceeding from the mouths of the demon horses, those who were spared did not repent of their idolatry, their vices, or their crimes. It is noteworthy that among the forms of idolatry mentioned the worship of the Emperor is not included.

מְלָכִים ("kings") misread as מְלָאֲכִים ("angels").

<sup>2</sup> τὰς ἀγγέλους "the companies" for τοὺς ἀγγέλους "the angels."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### The Little Book, The Measuring of the Temple, The Two Witnesses.

AS in the case of the seals so also in the case of the trumpets, episodes are interpolated between the sixth and the seventh. The parenthesis extends from x. 1-xi. 13. This section presents great difficulties. Some think that the editor has inserted it from another source, though with additions of his own, others believe that his thoughts take a new turn here. The episode of the angel with the little book seems to suggest that the author here begins to draw on a new source. He sees a mighty angel of dazzling countenance descend from heaven. He plants one foot on the sea and the other on the land and utters a cry loud as the roar of a lion. Then the seven thunders utter their voice.<sup>1</sup> They convey an intelligible message, for the seer intended to write it down.

<sup>1</sup> Züllig compares the description of the thunderstorm in Ps. xxix. where the Jews had observed that "the voice of Yahweh" occurs seven times.

But he was ordered to refrain from writing and not to disclose the revelation. Then the angel takes a solemn oath by the ever-living God, the Creator of the universe, that there shall be no longer delay,<sup>1</sup> but when the seventh trumpet sounds, the secret purpose of God is brought to completion, the glad tidings He has announced through His servants the prophets. The reference may be specially to the casting of the dragon out of heaven. Then the seer is bidden take the little book from the hand of the angel. To his request for it, the angel replied that he should take it and eat it and it would make a mingled impression upon him. He obeys the angel's command and finds the result what he had foretold. Then he learns that he has still to prophesy concerning many nations.

In apocalyptic fashion the seer discloses his meditations and perplexities on the course which he is to pursue in the development of his theme. He might naturally hasten to a conclusion with the sounding of the seventh trumpet. But he feels the impulse to use other material which he has at his disposal. First he is inclined to incorporate the utterance of the seven thunders.

<sup>1</sup> So R.V. margin with most modern scholars; no interval of time is to elapse before the end comes. The passage does not mean time is to give place to eternity. The sense is determined by Daniel xii. 7, on which the present passage is modelled. There in answer to the question "How long shall it be to the end of these wonders?" the interval is defined as "a time, times, and an half."



This may have existed in a literary form, but it may also represent a series of judgments like the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls, which he has seen in his vision. In any case he realizes that he may not disclose their secret. He must seal them up and write them not. It is noteworthy that the idea of sealing has here lost its original significance. For properly speaking it was the act by which a completed document was safeguarded against the disclosure of its contents. Here, however, the utterance of the seven thunders is not written down, so that there is no document to seal, and the sense of the passage is that the seer must abstain from writing and thus from divulging their secret. Yet while this revelation is withheld from publication, the little book contains a new series of prophecies. These he must first himself assimilate, and he will find them sweet to receive but bitter as he meditates upon them.<sup>1</sup>

Two more episodes follow before the sounding of the seventh trumpet, the measuring of the Temple and the two witnesses. In the former of these (xi. 1f.) the seer himself participates in the

<sup>1</sup> The episode of the little book rests primarily on Ezek. ii. 8-iii. 3, but we should also compare Jer. xv. 16, where there is a fuller suggestion of the mingled feeling which the revelation excited in the prophet. This gets no expression in Ezekiel, the book is in his mouth "as honey for sweetness"; but the tragic character of the message comes out in the fact that "there was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe." His prophetic task is not yet complete, he must enter on a new cycle of prophecy.

action. It is he who measures the Temple, the altar, and the worshippers, omitting the outer court, which is to be abandoned to the nations who shall tread Jerusalem underfoot for forty-two months. What is predicted is a destruction of Jerusalem from which only the inner parts of the Temple are to escape. The contradiction between this and the prediction of Jesus that the Temple would be so utterly destroyed that not one stone would be left upon another, strongly suggests that these verses came from a Jew rather than from a Jewish Christian.<sup>1</sup> If so, they were probably

<sup>1</sup> Bousset and Pfeiderer say that we can feel no great confidence in this argument. It is interesting to contrast Baur's handling of the passage with Weizsäcker's. Baur (*Evangelien* p. 605), starting from the conviction that the Apostle John wrote the Revelation, denies the authenticity of the prediction, attributed to Jesus, that the Temple would be overthrown. Had it been genuine, John could not have passed it by or failed to make it the main point in his description. The present passage is out of harmony with it. Weizsäcker (ii. 21) also recognizes that it does not agree with the well-known saying of Jesus, "whose authenticity, as is shown also by the history of Stephen, is hardly to be disputed." By what sort of artifice they were reconciled is uncertain. He rejects the view that the prophecy is of Jewish origin. On p. 175 he inverts Baur's argument, inferring that John was not the author of Revelation. "This utterance, coming from the lips of one of the original Apostles would do away with one of the best attested sayings in the tradition of the Synoptists." Mommsen was driven to his unnatural, not to say impossible, exegesis of the passage (see p. 71) by his clear recognition that the book was later than the destruction of Jerusalem, and the unquestioned assumption that it was a unity. Farrar regards Christ's prediction that the Temple would be destroyed as "an absolutely fatal argument against the notion that St. John anticipated that the Temple would be preserved." He "indicates the

written shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70. Wellhausen, in fact, argues from the reference to "those that worship therein" that it must have been written by a Zealot, inasmuch as the Zealots took up their quarters in the Temple during the siege and thought that they thus ensured their safety.<sup>1</sup> It is possible, as J. Weiss thinks, that the oracle was written by a Jew who was not actually in Jerusalem at the time and who expected that the Romans would capture the city but that God would protect the Temple from them. The period of forty-two months is equivalent to twelve hundred and sixty days and to three and a half years, the period intended by Daniel's words "a time and times and half a time." The selection of three and a half years is probably due to the fact that it is half of seven the perfect number.

We next pass to the section on the two witnesses

conversion of the Jews, not the deliverance of Jerusalem" (II. 277). The true solution is that the passage is earlier than the fall of the city and of non-Christian origin.

<sup>1</sup> *Skizzen* pp. 221-223, *Analyse* p. 15. He points out that, according to Josephus, the Zealot prophets were at the time numerous in Jerusalem and possessed great influence. The date was shortly before A.D. 70 or even in that year. Rev. xii. on the other hand proceeded from the circle of the Pharisees. "The Zealots said, Those who hold out in the Temple constitute the Messianic remnant; the Pharisees said, It consists of those who have fled from Jerusalem and from them the Messiah will come" (*Analyse* p. 21, cf. *Skizzen* p. 223). Gunkel (ZWTh, 1899, p. 600) and J. Weiss (*Off.* p. 129) reject this view of the origin of our fragment (see pp. 31f.). The latter dates it between May and August A.D. 70, or possibly a little earlier (pp. 129f.).

(xi. 3-13). These witnesses clad in sackcloth are to prophesy twelve hundred and sixty days. They are identified with the two olive trees of Zechariah, by which the prophet intended Zerubbabel and Joshua (Zech. iv.). They slay with fire from their mouth any who attempt to injure them, they can shut up heaven that it may not rain during the period of their ministry, they can turn the waters into blood, and whenever they wish can smite the earth with every plague. When they have borne their witness for twelve hundred and sixty days, the Beast from the abyss will attack and slay them. Their corpses lie in the street of the city and their burial is not permitted, and men who had been tormented by them will congratulate themselves at their deliverance from their baleful activity. Then, to the consternation of all who see it, at the end of the three days and a half they are restored to life, they are summoned by a great voice to come up into heaven, so they ascend in cloud while their enemies look on. A great earthquake follows, in which one-tenth of the city is destroyed and seven thousand persons are killed. The other inhabitants are terrified and give glory to God.

This section is extremely difficult. First of all there is the identification of the two witnesses. In the original sense we may without hesitation identify one of the witnesses with Elijah. Elijah destroyed with fire the soldiers sent by Ahaziah to

apprehend him and he shut up heaven that it might not rain for a similar period.<sup>1</sup> He also, though, unlike the witnesses, without the experience of death, went up into heaven. We cannot speak with such certainty, however, about the second witness. Jewish tradition seems to have expected one witness only, and the origin of the belief that there would be two witnesses is quite obscure. Our choice for the second witness lies between Enoch and Moses. Enoch prophesied to his godless contemporaries (Jude 14f.) and was translated like Elijah. The early church tradition almost unanimously accepted this identification, and possibly there may have lain behind this acceptance a knowledge of what the tradition actually intended. Most modern scholars take the second witness to be Moses, and it is strongly in favour of this that he turned the waters into blood and smote the earth with plague after plague. It is true that he was not translated like Enoch and Elijah, but he was buried by God Himself and it is he and not Enoch who appears with Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration. The meaning of the passage originally seems to have been that Moses and Elijah would reappear on earth clothed in the garb of prophets and exercising a prophetic ministry for three and a half years. They would safeguard

<sup>1</sup> The period is defined in 1 Kings xvii. 1 as three years (cf. "in the third year," xviii. 1). In Luke iv. 25 and James v. 17 it is defined as three years and six months.

themselves from the malice of their enemies by their power of inflicting death, would punish the earth with plagues, especially with the absence of rain and the turning of the waters into blood. They are immortal only till their work is done, then they are slain by the Beast, and after their dead bodies have been exposed unburied to the jubilant gaze of their enemies, they are quickened and return to heaven. The reference to the Beast is specially notable since hitherto he has not been mentioned, and yet he is spoken of incidentally as though well known to the readers.<sup>1</sup>

Several scholars, however, believe that, while the reference to the Old Testament worthies may be the original sense, the author had two contemporary personalities in mind, and this is not impossible. The question may perhaps be best approached by a reference to the scene of their ministry. The clause, "Where also their Lord was crucified," points so clearly to Jerusalem that it is remarkable that scholars holding this clause to be part of the original text nevertheless think that the city where the witnesses testify is Rome. But this clause is now regarded by not a few scholars as a gloss, so that the decision can hardly be made to depend upon it. Taken by itself "the great city" naturally

<sup>1</sup> It is not clear what is meant by "the beast" here. The author of the book may have taken it to mean Nero returning from hell; but presumably the figure belonged originally to mythology rather than to contemporary history.



suggests Rome ; in the description of the measurement of the Temple Jerusalem is called " the Holy City." Yet a Jewish writer might use this designation for Jerusalem, and it is three times so called in the Fifth Book of the Sibylline Oracles. The description of the city as Sodom and Egypt might not unfitly apply to Rome ; but elsewhere the capital of the empire is called Babylon, while the description of Jerusalem as Sodom was familiar in the Old Testament. The fact that only seven thousand persons are killed in the great earthquake in which a tenth of the city fell suits Jerusalem much better than Rome.

Assuming then that Jerusalem is the scene of their ministry we may set aside the view that the witnesses were Peter and Paul, who perished in Rome.<sup>1</sup> Nor need we discuss the view, in which Wetstein was followed by some of the older scholars, that they are the two Jewish high priests, Ananus and Jesus, who were murdered by the Zealots. If Christian leaders are intended who were already dead, we might think with Volkmar and Renan (pp. 403ff.) of James the son of Zebedee and James the Lord's brother who were both martyred. Renan leaves the alternative open that they may have been John the Baptist and Jesus. Bacon suggests that the two martyrs may have been James

<sup>1</sup> So C. H. Turner (p. 214). How could what is said of the witnesses in *vv.* 5f., 8-12, be spoken of Peter and Paul, or indeed of the other Christian leaders mentioned ?

the Lord's brother and John the son of Zebedee, who may possibly have been martyred at the same time.<sup>1</sup> Stuart Russell identifies the two witnesses with James the Lord's brother and Peter.<sup>2</sup> Probably however this whole type of interpretation should be set aside. The career of no contemporary historic figure corresponds to that depicted in our passage; for the author the appearance of the witnesses, their activity in prophecy and retaliation, and their fate lie in the future.

That they prophesy, work miracles, arouse hostility, are killed, reanimated and ascend to heaven might be urged in favour of a Christian

<sup>1</sup> *Fourth Gospel* pp. 136ff., 147. His discussion is complicated by the introduction into it of James the son of Zebedee. The section is, he thinks, a kind of substitute for "the seven thunders," and "is a cry from the tortured spirit of the Church, driven out in 64-67 A.D." from Jerusalem, and Luke ix. 51-56 is a rebuke to its vindictive spirit. The title "sons of thunder" refers to what they were *expected* to do, and is illustrated by what the two witnesses are said to have done.

<sup>2</sup> pp. 434-443. This involves the view that Peter, as well as James the Lord's brother, was martyred in Jerusalem, which Russell takes to have been Peter's usual abode. He adds: "Of course, we reject as unhistorical and incredible the lying legends of tradition which assign to him a bishopric and martyrdom in Rome. The imposture has received only too respectful treatment at the hands of critics and commentators. It is more than time that it should be relegated to the limbo of fable, with other pious frauds of the same character" (p. 440) That Peter was not bishop of Rome is probably correct on various grounds; but the tradition that he was martyred in Rome rests on evidence much too good to be brushed aside. It should be remembered that both Bacon and Russell make Jerusalem central for the Book, though widely differing in their general estimate of it.

origin on the ground of the parallel with the career of Jesus. But as prophets they remind us more of John the Baptist than Jesus, their miracles were of a destructive character, they remained unburied, their reanimation and ascension took place in full view of their enemies, their career presents no features which could not have been quite well predicted by a Jewish writer.<sup>1</sup>

The announcement that the second woe is past should properly have followed the sixth trumpet, as the similar announcement with reference to the first woe follows the fifth trumpet. That it is separated from the sixth trumpet is a clear indication that x. 1-xi. 13 is an insertion. The sounding of the seventh trumpet is not followed by any judgment. In this it corresponds to the seventh seal; but while the breaking of this was followed by silence in heaven, the sounding of the seventh trumpet is followed by great voices in heaven declaring that the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ. Then the heavenly Temple is opened, the ark is seen within it and there follow lightning, earthquake

<sup>1</sup> I refrain from discussing the problems of the date and the relation to xi. 1f. They are very complicated and it is difficult to feel any confidence as to the results. Bousset<sup>2</sup> gives them a careful and cautious examination (pp. 324-330), which the student may consult with profit. A bolder theory, but more speculative in its combinations, is suggested by J. Weiss (*Off.* pp. 126-134). Pfleiderer (iii. 434f.) recognizes that no solution, which is fully satisfactory, can be given to the problems which the section presents.

and hail, as at the close of the seals and the bowls. In view of x. 7 we should have anticipated that with the sounding of the seventh trumpet the final judgment would come, but we are barely as yet half through the Book.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

### The Woman, the Dragon, and the Child ; The War in Heaven.

IT has already been argued (pp. 32-39) that the story of the woman, the dragon and the man-child could not have had its origin with a Christian writer. It has undergone Christian revision ; but the story itself, whether it has come to the author by a Jewish channel or not, goes back ultimately to pagan mythology. But we are not at this point concerned with its original significance ; we must enquire what our author intended by it.

It will perhaps be best to begin with the question of the unity of the chapter. There is one strange feature in the narrative which suggests a composite origin. The flight of the woman to the wilderness is mentioned twice over. It is clear that two distinct flights are not intended, for not only is this improbable in itself, but the similarities between verse 6 and verse 14 are so great that they can hardly be explained except as variant versions of the same incident. Gunkel<sup>1</sup> and Wellhausen<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> SC pp. 274-276.

<sup>2</sup> *Skizzen* pp. 215-225, *Analyse* pp. 18-21.

both infer that two parallel accounts have been combined, one of which has been preserved in a very abbreviated form. They differ, however, as to the probable reconstruction. Gunkel thinks that the war with the dragon and his overthrow were struck out of the first story through fear of the mythological element. Wellhausen conjectures that the original close of the first story, containing the persecution of the woman on earth, has been omitted. Neither solution, however, is satisfactory. A better explanation has been offered by J. Weiss.<sup>1</sup> He starts from Spitta's observation that xii. 6 is simply a summary by the redactor of what is told more at length in xii. 14ff. But if so we have, when xii. 6 is removed, not two variants of the same story but two different stories. The only point they have in common is that each gives great prominence to the dragon. He analyses the chapter as follows:

A.—The birth of the Messiah, persecution by the dragon, the flight and persecution of the woman, the persecution of the woman's son.

B.—The war of Michael with the dragon in heaven, the overthrow of the dragon and his reign on the earth.

On this analysis there is no connexion between the persecution of the child and the war with the dragon. It is significant that the text as it stands implies no such connexion. It is only the present position of the section on the war between Michael and the

<sup>1</sup> *Off.* pp. 85-91.



dragon which suggests that such a connexion may once have existed. Gunkel admits that the connexion between the two is not explained, but argues that it must have existed.<sup>1</sup> He reconstructs it as follows : After the child is caught up, the dragon pursues him ; but a heavenly army opposes him to protect the boy, with the result not merely that he is rescued, but that the dragon is expelled from heaven. It is clear, however, that the story, as we have it, in no way supports this reconstruction. The motive for the dragon's overthrow can hardly have been what he states, for why should the angels fight for the child ? his safety has already been assured by his rapture to the throne of God. Had the war in heaven been originally connected with the persecution of the mother and child by the dragon, we should have expected that the overthrow of the dragon would, as in the pagan myth, have been the achievement of the child. But it is remarkable that neither here nor elsewhere in the Book, neither in heaven nor on earth, is the overthrow of the dragon attributed to the Messiah. In heaven it is Michael who leads the heavenly hosts to war against him. On earth, while the Messiah overcomes the Beast and the false prophet, the dragon is bound by an angel, not by the Messiah, and confined in the abyss for a thousand years ; and when he is finally cast into the lake of fire it is by an unnamed agency, after fire has descended from

<sup>1</sup> SC p. 257.

heaven to devour the innumerable hosts of Gog and Magog.

Without following J. Weiss into the more dubious elements of his theory, which may here be omitted, we shall probably do well to recognize the force of his contention that originally the narrative of the war in heaven was not connected with the story of the dragon, the woman and the child. What then is its significance? To understand the author's purpose we may start from the close of the story. In dark contrast to the jubilation in heaven is the announcement of woe to the earth and the sea. The devil has been expelled from heaven but, cast down from heaven, he has settled upon earth, and now the climax of the world's agony approaches. For he rages with an intensity of fury which forebodes the worst. The writer anticipates that a persecution of appalling and unprecedented violence is to burst upon the Church. And yet he finds hope in the very blackness of the terror and assures his trembling readers that the intolerable sharpness of their pains should give them confidence that it will soon be past. For the wild fury of the devil is the rage inspired by defeat already suffered and the consciousness of approaching downfall. The power of evil has already been broken, the decisive defeat inflicted in the heavenly places; and that the devil rages with such unparalleled ferocity is due to his knowledge that his appointed time draws near, so that all the manifestation of his hate must be

concentrated in a period that will soon run out. Hence even from the standpoint of earth the joy of heaven that the accuser of the brethren has been cast down is justified. For the heavenly voice does not give expression to the selfish joy that heaven, though at the cost of earth, is at last rid of the dragon. The triumph of heaven has for its sequel, it is true, the agony of earth, but it ensures earth's speedy deliverance. Hence the writer's message is, The expulsion of the devil from heaven will be followed by a persecution of the utmost severity ; but be of good cheer, the very intensity of the devil's rage is a sign that his might is broken, that his appointed time draws near, that the reign of terror will soon be past.

The other story, that of the dragon and the woman, is far less susceptible of a Christian application. The marks of pagan origin are still too patent and its remoteness from the actual career of the Christian Messiah too great. But the author must have attached some significance to it. It has already been pointed out that the original representation has undergone a striking transformation. Originally the mother flees from and is pursued by the dragon, before the child is born ; and, contriving to elude him, she brings forth the child in safety. Here, however, the escape of the mother is placed after the birth of the child, and thus loses its proper significance as the means to the child's safety, which is secured by His translation

immediately after birth to the throne of God. The motive which led to this transformation is uncertain. It may be partly due to a combination of two views as to the Messiah's origin; according to one He pre-exists in heaven with God, according to the other He is born of a woman.<sup>1</sup> It is true that the woman is no human mother and she is represented as herself in heaven; but such incongruities are in no way surprising when the origin of the story is considered. Partly the transposition in the order of events may have been occasioned by the author's desire to give a message to his own time. Foiled in his intention to devour the child and then in his attempt to destroy the mother, the dragon seeks to vent his spite on the woman by making war with her other children, the brethren of the Messiah. Hence persecution is about to break upon the Church or perhaps has already broken. Presumably the persecution is to last for three and a half years, but the author has a message of courage. The Messiah has been born, although He is no longer visible on earth. He is in heaven, waiting at the throne of God till the time for intervention has come. Therefore the deliverer is at hand, His birth and fortune after birth do not belong to the uncertain and perilous future.

Since the child is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron He is identical with the Messiah. The woman is therefore the mother of the Messiah. But clearly she cannot be identified with Mary

<sup>1</sup> Vischer pp. 26f., endorsed by Wellhausen, *Skizzen* p. 221.

the mother of Jesus ; for Mary was a simple earthly maiden, no heavenly woman clad with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a diadem of twelve stars on her head. Nor, after her child had been caught up to God, did she escape on eagle's wings to the wilderness from the malice of the dragon, nor was she preserved by the timely succour of the earth from the flood he poured after her to sweep her away. Nor can the woman reasonably be identified with the Christian Church which was the creation of the Messiah not His mother. She has with greater justice been taken as the Jewish community, and this may answer to the interpretation of the story in its Jewish form. Spitta (p. 352) who is followed by J. Weiss (*Off.* p. 137) prefers to regard her as the heavenly Jerusalem. She is not only the mother of the Messiah but of those who are persecuted by the dragon, that is the Jews. So Paul speaks of the Jerusalem that is above, that is the mother of us all (Gal. iv. 26). It would not be strange to represent the New Jerusalem as a woman. She is in fact the Lamb's Bride in Rev. xxi., just as Babylon also is depicted as a woman, the Harlot in contrast to the Bride. Her heavenly character and relation to the heavenly bodies, though no doubt taken over from the original description of a goddess, suits the heavenly Jerusalem better than an earthly community. The twelve stars are equally appropriate ; for the New Jerusalem has twelve gates, with twelve angels, and twelve names which are the

names of the twelve tribes, and twelve foundations ; its length is twelve thousand furlongs, the height of its wall a hundred and forty-four cubits ; while the tree of life bears twelve kinds of fruit. It is difficult, however, to think of the New Jerusalem, which till the consummation remains in heaven, as fleeing into the wilderness, which is apparently on earth, and as there nourished for three and a half years. If this identification is given up, we may perhaps fall back on the largely accepted view that the woman is the true Israel. It may thus be represented as the mother of the Messiah but also as the Jewish Christian Church. The incident of the flight of the woman is then frequently explained as the flight of the Jewish Christian Church from Jerusalem by which it escaped the horrors of the siege. We must, however, be extremely cautious in connecting traditional mythological material with historical incident. And in particular the view favoured by Renan (pp. 297f.) and other scholars, that the incident of the woman's peril, from which she was rescued by the earth, may be explained by some unrecorded attempt to intercept the flight which was happily defeated, seems to merit little consideration. The rest of the woman's seed may perhaps have been taken by the apocalyptist to represent the Gentile Christians or at least Christians, whether Jewish or Gentile, in other parts of the world.

It must seem strange to the reader that the birth of the Messiah should be placed by the author after



the sounding of the seventh trumpet and the long train of events that preceded it. It would probably be wrong to infer that here the author, having traced the development to the end, now begins over again and in another form tells his story a second time.<sup>1</sup> He is rather, as he moves towards the final conflict, bringing the protagonists on the stage, on the one side the dragon, the Beast, and the false prophet, on the other the Messiah, the armies of heaven, the persecuted Church on earth. The action of the book will move forward from the point reached when the previous chapter closes, but before it is resumed the chief actors are introduced and their mutual relations described.

<sup>1</sup> All the more that what follows is something very different from what has gone before.

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## CHAPTER XX.

### The Beast and the False Prophet.

WHEN the dragon was foiled in his attack on the woman, he used as instruments of his purpose two beasts. The first of these rose out of the sea, that is from the Mediterranean. As the seer stands on the beach of Patmos<sup>1</sup> and looks westward, he beholds in vision the monster rise from the deep. In other words the power symbolized by the Beast is a western power. That in the mythical material, which the writer is employing, the sea originally meant the abyss (xi. 7, xvii. 8), is not unlikely. But in the author's application of it the Beast is represented as coming from overseas.<sup>2</sup> In his description of it the author

<sup>1</sup> Read as A.V. "And I stood upon the sand of the sea" rather than "and he stood upon the sand of the sea," connecting with ch. xii. as R.V. The latter reading is better attested, but it is more probable that the third person has arisen out of conformity to what goes before than that the first person has arisen out of conformity to what follows. Influence of this kind works forwards rather than backwards. The seer rather than the dragon is the subject of the verb (cf. Spitta pp. 362f.).

<sup>2</sup> The sense is determined by *v.* 14 in which "the land" stands in contrast to the sea here.

draws especially on Dan. vii. Daniel has a vision of four beasts rising out of the Mediterranean. The first was like a lion with eagle's wings, the second a bear, the third a four-winged and four-headed leopard, the fourth a terrible nameless monster with ten horns and iron teeth. These beasts are great empires which are to be followed by the kingdom of the saints represented by one like unto a son of man, that is with human rather than brutal qualities.<sup>1</sup> Our author has combined the four beasts of Daniel into one. It has ten horns like the fourth beast in Daniel. Its seven heads are obtained by combining the four heads of the leopard with the three heads of the other beasts. The curious feature that the diadems are on the horns, not on the heads, is due to the fact that Daniel interprets the horns as kings, so that the diadems are intended to indicate their

<sup>1</sup> Traditionally the four empires have been identified with the Babylonian, the Persian, the Greek, and the Roman. Critical scholars identify them with Babylonian, Median, Persian, and Greek empires, the second being due to historical error on the author's part. The point is very important for the interpretation of Daniel, and if the data of Daniel were combined with those of Revelation to produce a continuous-historical scheme, it would be important for the interpretation of the Apocalypse. But as that method is not adopted here, we can leave the problem aside. The "one like a son of man" (Daniel vii. 13) is not the Messiah, for he is identified with "the saints of the Most High" in *vv.* 22, 27. The expression is collective rather than individual; the point is that as each of the first four empires is represented by a beast, the last is represented by a man, it is not brutal and bestial but human. Son of man means here, as often, simply man; it has not the technical sense it bears in the Gospels.

royal character. In xii. 3 where the dragon is described as having seven heads and ten horns, the diadems are transferred to the heads, thus making the picture more natural, and reduced from ten to seven to match the number of the heads. Other features borrowed from Daniel are that the Beast speaks blasphemies and continues forty-two months, that he makes war with the saints and overcomes them. Now where the author is operating, as he is demonstrably operating here, with traditional material, we must be very cautious in assuming that the details were invested by him with any special significance. So far as the seven heads and the ten horns are concerned, they recur in the description of the dragon (xii. 3) where they have apparently no contemporary reference. Besides, the Beast reappears in xvii. 3, having seven heads and ten horns. The heads receive a double interpretation, they are the seven mountains on which the woman is enthroned, and they are also seven kings ; while the ten horns are ten kings which have received no authority as yet, but will receive it for one hour. Undoubtedly the seven heads have a very important place in the allegory of the Scarlet Woman, but we cannot infer that a similar significance can be attributed to the number of the horns. All we can reasonably require is that the writer shall see sufficient general correspondence in the situation he describes or foresees to justify his employment of the tradition. It does not follow

that the details always stood in his own mind for something definite. He loyally incorporates them though they may be quite obscure to himself. All the more importance may be attached to those features which were apparently not borrowed. It is possible that some of these may come from forms of the tradition that we can no longer trace. But allowing for this possibility we can only point out here the elements in the description which are not derived from Daniel. The names of blasphemy, the blasphemy of God's tabernacle, the death-wound and healing of one of the heads, are, so far as we can see, original features which we may very well assume to have been suggested by contemporary circumstances.

In accordance with the interpretation given to the beasts in Daniel, we may assume that the Beast here also stands for a kingdom or possibly a king. Nor on the general view of the Apocalypse here adopted can there be any reasonable dispute that the writer has in mind the Roman Empire, whether in general or concentrated in an individual emperor. It is not quite easy to decide between these alternatives; and indeed the author himself seems to oscillate between the two, as is the case also in the seventeenth chapter. Spitta argues strongly that a person is intended.<sup>1</sup> The dragon is a personal power, namely Satan, so too is the second beast, that is the false prophet. Accordingly the first

<sup>1</sup> pp. 364f.

Beast should also be a person and this is confirmed by xvi. 13, xix. 20, and xx. 10. In xix. 19 the Beast is contrasted with the Messiah, and since the latter is personal this should be true of the former. Moreover the number of the Beast is the number of a man, and assuming the usual interpretation of this phrase the Beast is thus identified with a man rather than with an institution. On the other hand, since the beasts in Daniel are certainly empires, it is probable that the Beast of Revelation which combines the characteristics of them all should also represent an empire. This can hardly be doubted so far as the description in xvii. is concerned, for there the seven heads of the Beast are described as seven kings, that is seven Roman emperors. The Beast itself is accordingly not an individual emperor. But inasmuch as the authority of the institution was concentrated in the man who was emperor for the time being, we must not be surprised if language is used of the Beast which strictly was applicable only to the man. But at several points the question whether the man or the institution is intended affects the interpretation.

Of the features in the description which are not derived from Daniel, the "names of blasphemy"<sup>1</sup> cause no difficulty. There is general agreement

<sup>1</sup> It is uncertain whether we should read "name" or "names." Bousset reads the singular, Spitta (p. 367) the plural, each considering the textual evidence to favour his view. xvii. 3 strongly supports the plural, which I accept, though with no great confidence. It is read by the critical editors.



that these are the divine titles ascribed to the Roman emperors, including the title "Augustus," but not limited to this, or to Rome itself. But the other points have given rise to dispute. Spitta, accepting the identification with a person, argues at length for a reference to Caligula.<sup>1</sup> His attempt to violate the sanctity of the Temple by the order that his statue should be erected in the Holy of Holies suits the reference to blasphemy against God's tabernacle. The death-wound which was healed is explained as an allusion to the dangerous illness which threatened to prove fatal to him early in his reign from which, however, he recovered (see p. 101). His name Gaius Cæsar is also exactly 616 in Greek letters. But there are features in the description which do not suit this identification. The death-stroke is said to be the stroke of the sword, which cannot refer to illness. Spitta is accordingly driven to regard this as an editorial addition intended to identify the Beast with Nero; and if that is correct we might as well pass the same judgment on the reference to the death-wound that was healed. Spitta also supposes that the editor altered the number 616 which he regards as the original into

<sup>1</sup> pp. 365-395. His critical discussion of the passage, which is rather drastic, may be seen on pp. 134-141. It must be remembered that a Jewish Apocalypse from the time of Caligula is one of the three main sources which Spitta supposes that the author used. His reconstruction of it is printed in the Greek text on pp. 560-571; for his characterization of it and account of its historical significance see pp. 473-476, 490-492.

666 with the same intention. Pfeleiderer inclines to accept this solution with modifications.<sup>1</sup> I have always felt it to be very attractive, all the more that we should thus gain a companion passage, at least in some degree, to the description of the Man of Sin in 2 Thess. ii. 3-10. I am nevertheless unable to accept it, because the language of the chapter as it stands is inconsistent with it, and there is not sufficient justification for manipulating it into harmony with the events of Caligula's career; too much uncertainty attaches to Spitta's theory of a Caligula Apocalypse; and the theory that in the original text the number of the Beast was 616 is much too dubious to bear any weight. Another suggestion is that the reference in the death-stroke is to the death of Julius Cæsar. The Roman Empire seemed to have received in the murder of Cæsar a fatal wound but it recovered. There is some difficulty in supposing that the writer should allude to an event which lay so far in the past. But the representation does not suit the interpretation. For the wound was inflicted on one of the heads, and if the death-stroke was healed the head should have recovered. But Julius Cæsar did not return to life; the healing on this interpretation is of the empire not of the man. Nor is it easy to adjust the number of the Beast to Julius Cæsar.

At this point then we may take up the problem

<sup>1</sup> iii. 449f., cf. iv. 125. Spitta's interpretation of xiii. 3 as referring to the illness of Caligula he regards as impossible.

as to the number of the Beast. It is most unfortunate that there is an uncertainty in the text. Irenæus mentions 616 as an alternative to 666 and this is found in the MSS. C, 5, 11, and also in Tyconius. It is accordingly rather poorly attested. An estimate of intrinsic probabilities might seem to favour 616, for it seems more likely that a symmetrical number should be produced from, rather than degraded into, an unsymmetrical one. In other words if the number was 616 in the first instance one could understand that it might be changed into 666 in order to gain the triple six, whereas there would be no reason for changing 666 into 616. Yet there might be a reason, if an editor or scribe thought that 616 answered better to the description than 666. If for any reason, such as the belief that the author had Caligula in mind, or that Nero Cæsar was better spelt in the briefer form which gives this figure rather than in the longer which yields 666, he preferred the lower number, he might deliberately substitute it, believing that he was restoring the original. Or 616 may be the mere blunder of a copyist. And reasons which might lead to the alteration into 666 might just as well have guided its adoption in the first instance. The balance of probability as between the two readings seems decidedly in favour of 666. But of course other considerations must be taken into account.

The solution of the riddle propounded by the author is by no means so certain as scholars have

often asserted.<sup>1</sup> The general view is that the number is reached by the addition of the numerical value of the letters composing the required name. In Hebrew and Greek the letters of the alphabet stood also for numerals, and calculations of the numerical value of names were quite familiar in antiquity. The problem then is to find a person<sup>2</sup> who suits all the other conditions and whose name, when numerically calculated, yields the number 666, or 616, whichever reading may be adopted. Unfortunately

<sup>1</sup> Thus Pfeiderer, who thinks the solution Nero Cæsar "has still the preponderant probability in its favour," says "we can no longer at the present day give a single interpretation as the sole possible and absolutely certain" (iii. 449). Weinel goes further and says that the calculation of the number of the Beast according to the numerical value of the Greek and Hebrew letters has led to such divergent results that the attempt should be given up (p. 502). It is almost amusing to read the confident assertions made in the last century by defenders of the "Nero Cæsar" solution. In the preface to his *Über Johannes Marcus und seine Schriften* (1843) Hitzig says: "That the Apocalypse was written under Galba is here no longer in question, and I need waste no words on the point that the number 666 signifies נרון קסר, the emperor Nero" (p. viii.). Farrar says: "The number of the Beast—which may be now regarded as *certainly* intended to stand for Nero" (ii. p. 233). Reuss, who independently hit on this solution, goes so far as to say, "The key to the Apocalypse and the test of its interpretation is in the decipherment of the number 666 (ch. xiii. 18), which, after a thousand vain attempts . . . was explained almost simultaneously by several since 1835 by נרון קסר *i.e.*, Nero Cæsar" (HNT p. 156 cf. CT i. 378-381). Such dogmatic assertions are the more curious that first-rate authorities still preferred *λαρεῖνος*, *e.g.*, Lücke, Bleek, de Wette, Düsterdieck. This solution also has been affirmed with unwarrantable dogmatism.

<sup>2</sup> This seems to be the meaning of the clause "it is the number of a man."

the solutions proposed have been very numerous ; and even when they have been drastically reduced by the elimination of names otherwise unsuitable, there are several possibilities that have to be taken into consideration. It is, moreover, quite conceivable that the name is now irrecoverable. The writer himself may, though this is most improbable, have been ignorant of it. In other words the number may have come to him as part of the sacred tradition and, himself ignorant of the key, he may have challenged his readers to find it. Presumably, however, he had a definite solution in his mind and anticipated that some of his readers would be acute enough to discover it by following the clues to identification which he had given.

It is by this method of numerical calculation that the mystery is probably to be solved. But before we proceed to follow it, it will be desirable to say something of another view. This is that the number itself is significant quite apart from the numerical value of the letters which compose it. In 666 we have the triple repetition of 6. Since 7 is the number of perfection, this suggests that 6 is the number of imperfection, and thus the power of evil was aptly represented by a number in which it persistently recurs. The triple 6 might therefore fitly symbolize the Antichrist, all the more that Jesus represented 888 and thus went beyond the thrice perfect as much as the Beast fell short of it. It is by no means impossible that these considerations

were taken into account by the author, even if he identified the Beast by adding together the letters of his name. But the writer must surely have meant more than so vague a statement as that the number of the Beast was such as to express its evil character. All solutions must be wrong which do not start from recognition of the fact that the author saw in the mysterious number a clue to the identity of the Beast. To invite the readers to discover by the number of his name the imperfection of his character would be to challenge them to force an open door.

If then we follow the usual method we have to consider names in Hebrew or in Greek.<sup>1</sup> No importance attaches to the objection that in a book written in Greek and for Greek readers we must assume that the name was calculated in Greek. It is true that the author, describing Christ as the First and the Last, speaks of Him as the Alpha and the Omega, drawing on the Greek alphabet, and that in ix. 11 he gives Apollyon as the Greek equivalent of Abaddon. Not only have we to reckon with the possibility that the Apocalypse, or this section of it, may have been written in Hebrew, but we should remember that to guard the secret more successfully from those who must not be permitted

<sup>1</sup> Latin may probably be disregarded, since comparatively few letters in the alphabet had a numerical value. The best-known solution on this line seems to be DCLVX (Diclux). This is in fact DCLXVI with necessary transposition of letters.



to penetrate it, Hebrew was much more effective than Greek. We must not forget that the author was of the Jewish race, and he warns his readers that the solution will demand the exercise of special intelligence. And such intelligence might be shown not simply in calculating the name, but in remembering that Greek was not the only language in which it could be calculated.

Irenæus had no information on the subject, but he mentions three solutions, all in Greek letters, Euanthas, Lateinos, and Teitan. The first of these calls for no discussion, the second has been one of the most widely accepted solutions. The third, which Irenæus himself preferred, was accepted by Wetstein,<sup>1</sup> who pointed out that by omitting the final letter, thus making the word "Teita," we might accommodate this solution to the number 616 given by the alternative reading. In some ways this would not be inappropriate, since the Titans assailed the gods and would thus suitably designate Antichrist. It has been recently revived by Dr. E. A. Abbott.<sup>2</sup> Its contemporary allusion is supposed to be to the Flavian dynasty, each member of it, Vespasian and his two sons, being called Titus. There is, however, a difference between Teitan and Titus, and it is the latter which is the name of a man. Lateinos is attractive and we need not press the objection that the name should

<sup>1</sup> ii. pp. 806f.

<sup>2</sup> pp. 81-83.

according to Greek usage be spelt *Latinos*. But it is nevertheless improbable, for it is not a personal name such as we want, and the word was unusual. In contemporary usage *Romaïos* (that is, "Roman") was employed, not *Lateinos*. This objection applies also to the solution "the Latin kingdom" proposed by J. E. Clarke and regarded by Adam Clarke as amounting nearly to demonstration. This has recently (1901) been put forward by Clemen<sup>1</sup> in apparent ignorance that he had been anticipated. He gives as an alternative "the Italian kingdom" which yields 616. But any reference to a kingdom is ruled out by the requirement that the number should be the number of a man.<sup>2</sup>

Of other solutions in Greek letters we may set aside the ingenious solution of Grotius,<sup>3</sup> "*Oulpios*" *i.e.*, *Vulpius*, the name of Trajan, since it is not likely that the date of the verse is so late. Trajan may of course have been regarded by some as the author regards the Beast; but Grotius' estimate of him seems much too unfavourable, and he did not rank for the Church with Nero or Domitian. The final letter also should represent 200 rather than 6

<sup>1</sup> ZNTW ii. p. 114. By an oversight Clemen reverses the two solutions of 666 and 616; Vischer mentions (ZNTW iv. p. 167) that Prof. Porter had called his attention to the mistake.

<sup>2</sup> Clemen says (p. 112) that "the number of a man" according to xxi. 7 and in this context can only mean a number as men use it. With Corssen (ZNTW iii. p. 238) I find this explanation unintelligible.

<sup>3</sup> *Annot. de Antichristo* pp. 470f.

which is required by this interpretation. The only Greek solution, apart from Lateinos, which seems to merit serious consideration is Gaios Kaisar. This, as already mentioned, is the name and title of Caligula. Zahn, who rejects the whole view of the Apocalypse in which such solutions have their place, predicted that it would be proposed.<sup>1</sup> It is Spitta's solution,<sup>2</sup> but it should probably be rejected on the grounds previously stated, the language cannot be made to suit Caligula without violence and this solution involves the acceptance of the inferior reading 616. Deissmann, who takes 616 to be the original reading, has recently suggested<sup>3</sup> Kaisar Theos "the Divine Cæsar," which is not inappropriate, but probably not sufficiently definite.

We turn to solutions in Hebrew. Already in the seventeenth century the Hebrew for "Roman" had been proposed, but it was not till the nineteenth century that Hebrew became prominent in this connexion. In 1828 Ewald in his Latin Commentary on the Revelation, while accepting Lateinos for 666 proposed Cæsar of Rome as a solution in Hebrew

<sup>1</sup> In his *Apokalyptische Studien* i. 571. In INT iii. 449 he says that this solution is reported to have been offered by Weyers. Zahn considers that the reading 616 which it requires was due to a change made in Rome or the West in order to find a reference in the passage to Caligula.

<sup>2</sup> pp. 392-395.

<sup>3</sup> *Light from the Ancient East* pp. 275-277. Moulton and Milligan refer to it, apparently with approval, in *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* Part I. p. 76.

of 616. In 1836 Hitzig, Benary, and Reuss all proposed the now famous Neron Cæsar in Hebrew letters. Apparently each of them hit upon it independently, but there was an unseemly dispute as to priority and insinuations as to unacknowledged appropriation. On this undignified episode we need not dwell, the less that it was suddenly ended by the discovery that Fritzsche had already put it forward in 1831.<sup>1</sup> It had in fact occurred to Ewald in 1828, but he rejected it on the ground that it involved an inadmissible Hebrew spelling of Cæsar. According to the usual spelling the name would yield 676. But if it is written "defectively," *i.e.*, with the omission of the Yod, it gives 666. There is some warrant for this spelling<sup>2</sup> and Ewald himself accepted this solution later. A host of scholars has adopted it and it has been frequently represented as quite certainly the correct answer to the problem. It is still probably the most widely accepted solution, though adherence to it is now much more cautiously expressed. It should be observed that if we transliterate into Hebrew the Latin form "Nero," instead of the Greek "Neron," we get 616. Of course its acceptance will depend largely on the answer we give to the question whether on other grounds than the solution of the number we identify Nero with the Beast. It may be added that some

<sup>1</sup> References may be found, with a brief account of the episode in Bleek pp. 283f.

<sup>2</sup> See Renan's note pp. 415f.

scholars, for example Gebhardt<sup>1</sup> and Beyschlag, combine with this solution that in Greek letters, Lateinos. Bruston<sup>2</sup> in 1880 identified the head wounded to death with Julius Cæsar, and as according to xvii. 10 the author was writing under the sixth emperor he concludes that Julius Cæsar being the first, Nero was the sixth, hence was still alive and could not be the Beast. The Beast was rather Julius Cæsar, but since his name does not give 666, another identification must be found. Since Babylon stands for Rome we must find a Babylonian name, as Vitranga had already seen. It must be one who stood in the same relation to the Babylonian empire in which Cæsar stood to the Roman. His solution is "Nimrod son of Cush" in Hebrew. He regards the identification with Julius Cæsar as of capital importance, since it cuts at the root of all the exegetical systems which find allusions to the fable of Nero Redivivus. We have already seen, however, that the reference to Julius Cæsar is in other respects improbable; and it can hardly be doubted that this ingenious but far-fetched and fantastic suggestion will do nothing to strengthen it.

Gunkel argues that the mysterious significance attaching to the number proves that it must be

<sup>1</sup> *The Doctrine of the Apocalypse* p. 224 ("As a pure supposition, however, and one to which I do not attach much importance").

<sup>2</sup> *Le chiffre 666 et l'hypothèse du retour de Néron*. He repeats his theory in ZNTW v. 260.

a very ancient piece of apocalyptic tradition. He sets aside the identification with Nero and suggests that the number is to be calculated in Hebrew letters and that the solution is "primæval chaos."<sup>1</sup> This is exposed to various objections and in this form may not secure acceptance. But as a partial explanation it may well be on the right lines.

It is to Corssen, however, that we owe one of the most valuable suggestions.<sup>2</sup> He says that the statement that the number of the Beast is the number of a man has not received its due. The Beast and the man have each to be taken into account. Accordingly the number has two solutions, 666 is the number of the Beast but in addition to that it is the number of a man.<sup>3</sup> The number of the Beast had come down in tradition and presumably the solution was also preserved in the tradition. But now the author has made a discovery. The ancient apocalyptic number of the Beast is also the number of a man. If some solution on Gunkel's lines is accepted, it does not accordingly exclude a solution applicable to contemporary history. The primæval chaos monster is or is to be incarnate in

<sup>1</sup> SC 377f.

<sup>2</sup> In his article *Noch einmal die Zahl des Tieres in der Apokalypse* ZNTW iii. 238-242.

<sup>3</sup> This is an example of *isopsephic* numbers, *i.e.*, two names have the same numerical value. Farrar ii. 291 seems to apply the term to the equation of Nero Cæsar with 666; similarly F. Legge, *Forerunners and Rivals of Christianity* i. 105. But properly it should be restricted to cases of *two* (or more) names, the sum of whose letters is identical.



a man. Corssen does not express an opinion whether Gunkel's view or that now generally adopted is correct. But he insists that both may be correct. It is clear that the acceptance of this view would greatly ease the identification with Nero Cæsar. The adoption of a solution in Hebrew letters for the number of the man would be explained by the fact that the number of the Beast was given in Hebrew letters. Moreover the defective spelling of Cæsar was due to the fact that the author was not at liberty to give the number according to the full spelling. He was fettered by his material and 666 was the traditional number from which he was not free to diverge. It required a trifling and possibly quite legitimate manipulation to force Nero Cæsar into this number, but it *was* trifling. The most probable view still remains that most generally accepted, that the writer intended Nero Cæsar in Hebrew letters as the answer to the problem he sets;<sup>1</sup> and it is not unlikely that he knew also a traditional solution, the two relating in his judgment to the same figure.

<sup>1</sup> It is amazing that Benson should say, with reference to the Sibylline Oracles v. 28, that it "gives the number of Nero's name as 50, so that there was no suspicion that 666 was a Hebrew indication of it, though the author is an Alexandrian Jew" (p. 171). The most cursory examination of the passage shows that the writer is designating a series of Roman emperors by the initial letter of their names. So here Nero is said to have "the letter of fifty," because fifty is the numerical value of the first letter of his name. No one letter could possibly express 666. Hence the principle is quite different in the Sibyllines and in our passage.

It may be added that Wellhausen takes the verse to be an addition by the same hand to which he attributes the close of verse 10. He says, "the interpretation of the number as referring to Nero is of course correct, but it did not deserve so much fuss as has been made of it, and it had the disastrous consequence that people believed that in it they had found the key to the understanding of the whole. It was only the key to the misunderstanding of the Beast."<sup>1</sup> This of course is connected with Wellhausen's theory that "Nero Redivivus" belongs to a late stratum of the book.

Apart from this, however, the suggestion has occasionally been made that the clause is a gloss.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Analyse* p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Spitta (p. 141) takes the last clause of xiii. 17 with the whole of 18, apart from its final clause, as due to the redactor of the Caligula Apocalypse. Briggs (pp. 323f.) thinks that this clause also is a part of the redactor's note, but does not assign any reason beyond his impression. Vischer raised no question as to the authenticity of the passage in his dissertation; but in an article in ZNTW iv. 167-174, he says that it is questionable if the verse is not an explanatory interpolation (p. 168). Recently H. A. Sanders in JBL March-June, 1918, discusses the problem from the textual side. He says (p. 97), "The whole problem has been brought into a new stage by the discovery, that the verse 13 : 18, is omitted in the text of Beatus." Since "Beatus derived much of his commentary, and so probably his Bible text, from the lost commentary of Ticonius," and the anonymous commentator in Augustine seems to have taken his text from him, "we may assume that the Old Latin text of North Africa omitted the number. The whole of verse 18 is natural commentary addition" (pp. 97f.). The textual evidence is not without weight in itself, and it confirms a suspicion entertained by some scholars that the passage has been interpolated; but the balance of evidence seems still to be heavily on the side of its authenticity as it stands.

The possibility of this must be admitted, but there is no cogent reason for the suspicion.

In the preceding discussion it has been assumed that it is the first Beast, the Beast from the sea, whose number is here given. Mr. J. T. Dean, however, argues in his commentary that it is the second beast to which the number refers. Of course there is the possibility of ambiguity due to the fact that two beasts are mentioned in the paragraph. But after the opening of the paragraph where, to make the reference quite clear, the author speaks of the first Beast, he means by the Beast the Beast from the sea. Unquestionably this is so in verses 14 and 15, and this must control the interpretation of the closing verses. Nor are the reasons assigned for the identification of the second beast at all convincing.

The beast from the land has been identified with Simon Magus, in particular by Spitta (pp. 377-384). He is spoken of as a false prophet and is therefore probably a person. The land is interpreted as the Holy Land which agrees with Simon's Palestinian origin. He exercises all the authority of the Beast in his sight, *i.e.*, at Caligula's court, and employs his mechanical skill in establishing the emperor's divinity. This view is exposed to grave objections. We have no evidence that Simon Magus was at Rome before the reign of Claudius, and even if he had come to the capital in Caligula's time it is most unlikely that he would be invested with

the emperor's power at the imperial court itself. No miracles were needed to establish the divinity of an autocrat, who held the lives of all his subjects at his mercy and who tolerated no hesitation in their acknowledgment of his claim. No stress can be laid on the identification of the land with Palestine. And if we reject the identification of the first Beast with Caligula, the identification of the second with Simon Magus should probably be rejected with it. The suggestion that Vespasian in the reign of Nero played the part of the second beast it is difficult to take seriously.<sup>1</sup>

The conditions described are those which already existed in Asia or were anticipated. The function of the second beast is to promote and enforce the worship of the emperor. The people are deluded by what they take to be miracles into believing that the statue of the emperor has life and speech. Ramsay explains that the second beast is "The Province of Asia in its double aspect of civil and religious administration, the Proconsul and the Commune." He says: "This monster *had two horns* corresponding to this double aspect, and it was *like unto a lamb*, for Asia was a peaceful country,

<sup>1</sup> This was made by Hildebrandt ZWTh, 1874, pp. 57f. It was popularised by Farrar (ii. 308-315), who thought, however, that the writer might have "mingled two conceptions in his description," blending with features of Vespasian those of Simon Magus and Josephus, the latter the false prophet who embraced the cause of Vespasian in Palestine. It may be added that Krenkel had suggested Josephus,

where no army was needed. Yet *it spake as a dragon*, for the power of Rome expressed itself quite as sternly and haughtily where it was unsupported by troops, as it did when it spoke through the mouth of a general at the head of an army. The monster *exerciseth all the authority of the first Beast in his sight*, for the provincial administration exercised the full authority of the Roman Empire, delegated to the Proconsul for his year of office. It *maketh the earth and all that dwell therein to worship the first Beast*, for the provincial administration organised the state religion of the emperors.”<sup>1</sup> Mommsen had previously thought of the imperial representatives in Asia.<sup>2</sup> The description of the second beast as the false prophet, and the restriction of its functions to the imperial cult, rather favour the view that the civil authority is not so much in mind as the organisation specially charged with the worship of the emperor in the provinces, and particularly in Asia.

We must be on our guard against the view that the passage describes conditions which exist already in their completeness. For one thing we have to reckon with the probability that the author draws on the traditional representations of Antichrist. We have only to turn to the description of the man of lawlessness in 2 Thess. ii. 3-10 for an instructive parallel. The son of perdition sets himself up

<sup>1</sup> *Letters* p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> PRE ii. 198.

against God and sits in God's Temple claiming himself to be God. Paul says of him that his "coming is according to the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceit of unrighteousness for them that are perishing ; because they receive not the love of the truth that they might be saved. And for this cause God sendeth them a working of error, that they should believe a lie." Here it is clear that Paul anticipates that the Antichrist will claim divine worship and that by the power of Satan lying wonders will be wrought to seduce into acceptance of his idolatrous claims those who were in the way of ruin because they had not welcomed the truth. That in an age of magic and jugglery such signs and wonders were already pressed into the service of the imperial cult, that statues of the emperor were made, which by mechanical arts seemed to breathe and move and by ventriloquism or other devices appeared to speak, is not at all impossible. But it is equally possible that the whole description in our passage is predictive, or that, while the writer starts from the situation with which he is familiar, he is actually describing developments which he anticipates, drawing on traditional material for the description of the miracles by which the Beast's reputation was to be enhanced.

Numerous interpretations have been put upon the mark of the Beast. The word translated "mark" was a technical term for seals inscribed



with the name and year of the emperor, which had to be affixed to documents relating to buying and selling. Deissmann takes the mark of the Beast as a reference to this.<sup>1</sup> In its favour is the statement "that no man should be able to buy or to sell, save he that hath the mark." But this implies that there was something in the use of the mark inconsistent with the profession of Christianity. To use it in purely civil transactions would, however, have been simply to render to Cæsar the things that were Cæsar's, and thus fulfil the law of Christ. Ramsay says that there was no reason why Christians should not use the official stamp as freely as pagans ; it had no official character.<sup>2</sup> His own view is that the Commune may have recommended the loyal to discountenance the disloyal by boycotting them and suggests that the mark of the Beast may have been an official certificate of loyalty such as became familiar in later persecutions.<sup>3</sup> This explanation, as well as Deissmann's, must be rejected, for the language of the passage is clear that the mark is not something affixed to or written on a document, it is placed on the right hand or the forehead. The only explanation which suits the conditions is that the

<sup>1</sup> *Bible Studies* pp. 240-247.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters* p. 106.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters* pp. 105-111. It may be added that Mommsen (PRE ii. 198) from the association of the mark with trade and commerce, infers that "there lies clearly at bottom an abhorrence of the image and legend of the imperial money—certainly transformed in a fanciful way, as in fact Satan makes the image of the emperor speak."

devotees of the emperor will have his mark or his number tattooed or branded on their hand or forehead. The mark is defined as the name of the emperor, whether his personal name or perhaps more probably a divine title, one of the names of blasphemy. The custom of religious tattooing is familiar.<sup>1</sup> We have a reference to it in Isaiah xlv. 5, "and another shall write on his hand, For Yahweh." It is possible that already some fanatics had tattooed upon their persons the emperor's name. But certainly none had decorated themselves with the number 666. The writer accordingly is predicting the future, not depicting the present. Whether the compulsory branding or tattooing is due, as J. Weiss supposes,<sup>2</sup> to the growing fanaticism of the provincials is doubtful. Presumably the author anticipates that the authorities themselves will make and enforce this regulation, in order to ensure that no one can evade it. With the meshes of the net so fine, he is

<sup>1</sup> Wetstein collects a large number of classical passages in his note on Gal. vi. 17, though largely of non-religious stigmatisation. See also Heitmüller, *Im Namen Jesu* pp. 174f. We have an interesting parallel in 3 Macc. ii. 29, included by Wetstein, but annotated by Willamowitz-Moellendorff in *Hermes*, vol. 34 (1899). The passage refers to Ptolemy Philopator's tyranny towards the Jews, degrading them to natives and serfs, and punishing with death any protest against this treatment, and proceeds, "and that those who were registered should even be branded on their bodies with an ivy-leaf, the emblem of Dionysus, and be reduced to their former limited status." Willamowitz-Moellendorff points out that Philopator took the title of "new Dionysus" and had an ivy-leaf tattooed on his person.

<sup>2</sup> *Off.* pp. 17f.

filled with the foreboding that no Christian will be able to escape death when Antichrist is enthroned, save by an act of apostasy, which will doom those who receive it to have their part with the dragon, the Beast and the false prophet in the lake of fire.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

### Scenes of Blessedness and Judgment.

FROM the anguish to be endured by the loyal servants of God for their refusal to worship the Beast or bear his mark, we turn to the picture of the Lamb standing on Mount Zion, surrounded by a hundred and forty-four thousand who bear His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads. It is characteristic of the author that before scenes of judgment he should place contrasted scenes of blessedness. And thus as the reader passes from the activities of the dragon, the Beast, and the false prophet, to the warnings and descriptions of judgment which fill the rest of the chapter, his feelings are relieved by this brief description. Although short, it is by no means easy, and the views of scholars diverge widely. We have already met a hundred and forty-four thousand, sealed out of every tribe of Israel (vii. 4). It is therefore tempting to identify the two. But while in the former case the number is constituted by the selection of twelve thousand

from each tribe of Israel, here they are apparently celibates. Yet while it is difficult to identify the two, there are several points of contact. The number is the same, their presence on Mount Zion perhaps indicate that they are Jews, the sealing in the earlier passage corresponds with the writing of the name on the forehead here. Possibly each of the two companies is the counterpart of the other, but it is not unlikely that in the original form the two were identical. Nor is it clear whether Mount Zion is the earthly or the heavenly Jerusalem. If those who sing the new song before the throne are the hundred and forty-four thousand, the heavenly Mount Zion must be intended. But if the seer intends the earthly Mount Zion, then the singers cannot be the companions of the Lamb. In that case we must throw stress on the words "to learn." The heavenly harpers already know the song, the hundred and forty-four thousand are the only members of the human race who are able to master its mysterious strains. This new song is not the new song of praise to the Lamb for redemption, of which we have read before, but a song for the learning of which the special condition of the hundred and forty-four thousand was the necessary qualification. Yet in both cases it is interesting that stress is laid on the thought of purchase from among men. If Mount Zion is on earth the scene is apparently not placed in chronological order. The author relieves the gloom by

carrying his readers forward to depict Christ in His millennial reign accompanied by those who had been purchased to be the first-fruits to God and the Lamb, celibates free from falsehood in speech and from blemish in life.

After this short interlude we hear again of approaching judgment. Three angels<sup>1</sup> fly in mid-heaven, each with his proclamation to mankind. This is, in the case of the first angel, called an eternal gospel. It is not the Gospel itself which is intended, but the announcement which the angel makes, "the good tidings" of which we have previously read in x. 7. In tacit opposition to the worship of the Beast, men are enjoined to worship God since the hour of judgment has come. The second angel announces the fall of Babylon, anticipating the announcement of xviii. 2. The third angel utters a lurid prediction on the fate of those who worship the Beast and are branded with his mark. In language of terrible power he threatens

<sup>1</sup> The first of these is described as "another angel." This creates a difficulty, since it is not clear with what angel this one is contrasted. Bousset follows **NQ** in omitting "another" on account of the insuperable difficulty it creates. But it is more likely that the omission in **NQ** was created by the difficulty. The contrast may be with the angel mentioned in x. 1. J. Weiss very ingeniously suggests that we should read *ἀετόν* for *ἄγγελον*, "and I saw another eagle flying in mid heaven." It is in favour of this that we read in viii. 13, "I heard an eagle flying in mid-heaven saying." But the reference to a second and a third angel in xiv. 8f. implies that an angel was mentioned in this verse, and it is a rather violent elimination of the difficulty to assume that the second and third angels were due to the final author.



them with the undiluted wine of God's anger. They are to be tormented with fire and brimstone, while the angels and the Lamb look on at their torture. For ever the smoke of their torment will ascend. The relief of sleep is for ever denied them; day and night without intermission their pain continues. How great then is the need, the author adds, for the endurance of the saints under the pressure which will be put upon them to participate in this idolatry! If they give way under the strain these torments will be their portion.

A heavenly voice is heard proclaiming the blessedness of those who die in the Lord. They rest from their labours, their works follow them to receive their reward. It is not clear whether we should translate "Blessed from henceforth are the dead who die in the Lord," or "Blessed are the dead who from henceforth die in the Lord." With the former rendering the sense is that from the time of the utterance the blessedness of those who die in the Lord will begin. There will be for them no interval of waiting before they enter on the enjoyment of their rest. With the other interpretation the meaning is that those are blessed who from this time forward die in the Lord. The reason for the exceptional favour thus accorded to them is apparently that those who die from now onwards are expected to die in the great tribulation, the persecution which is about to burst in full fury

upon the Church, and their loyalty in face of extreme pressure will be rewarded by immediate enjoyment of their heavenly rest.

Two scenes now follow describing the harvest and the vintage of the earth. Unquestionably the passage taken by itself seems to describe the last judgment. But we are still some way from the end, so that according to the present arrangement this can only be a preliminary judgment. The analytic critics for the most part regard this section as the description given, in one of the sources, of the final judgment. This is possible, but the reference to the treading of the winepress without the city favours Bousset's tentative suggestion that originally the passage may have been connected with the section on the two heavenly witnesses. The passage has presumably been adapted to some extent for its new function. Thus it is not improbable that in its original connexion the figure on the cloud like unto a son of man may have been intended for the Messiah. Here, however, he is not the Messiah but an angel who receives his instruction to reap the earth from another angel. The representation of the judgment as effected in two stages, a harvest and a vintage, may be due to the interpretation of the two parallel lines in Joel iii. 13 as referring to distinct events. Whether the writer attached a different significance to them is uncertain. Some suppose that the harvest represents the ingathering of the good, the vintage the judgment

of the wicked. Another view is that the harvest represents the judgment on the heathen, the vintage the judgment on Israel, since the winepress is trodden outside Jerusalem. But more probably no distinction of any kind is intended, since none is implied by Joel in the passage on which this section is based. Really it is the judgment on ungodly humanity which here receives a double representation. The ghastly description of the treading of the winepress recalls the repulsive but highly effective description of Yahweh's return from Edom, His garments dyed crimson in the blood of the foes He has trodden in His winepress (Isa. lxiii. 1-6). It is regrettable that a Christian writer should have permitted himself either to write or to borrow this description of the river of blood, which pours from the winepress till it is so deep that it reaches to the bridles of the horses and extends for a distance equivalent to the length of Palestine. In Enoch c. 3 we read, "And the horse shall walk up to the breast in the blood of sinners and the chariot shall be submerged to its height." A Talmudic parallel is also quoted, "Nor shall they cease slaying till the horse is submerged in blood to the mouth."

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## CHAPTER XXII.

### The Seven Bowls.

THE harvest and vintage of earth are followed by the third and last series of plagues, the seven bowls. But, once more, before the vision of judgment there is a consoling vision depicting the blessedness of those who have come victorious from their conflict with the Beast. The prophet sees a glassy sea mingled with fire. Of the crystal sea before the throne we have read in the opening vision of heaven (iv. 6). Here the clause "mingled with fire" has given great trouble to the interpreters. If the description is symbolical, the widely accepted view that the fire represents the wrath of God may be correct. It is not unlikely, however, that interpreters are tempted to see religious symbols where the author intended nothing of the kind. The phrase was not improbably suggested by a sunset or a sunrise on a still sea. Or perhaps it goes back to primitive ideas. The lightning shoots from the sky which is the bed of the heavenly ocean ; if in a thunderstorm water and fire both come out of the firmament, then the idea

that fire was actually present in the celestial sea is an obvious explanation. There is a striking parallel in *The Book of the Secrets of Enoch* xxix. 1f. : "and from the gleam of my eye the lightning received its wonderful nature, *which* is both fire in water and water in fire, and one does not put out the other, nor does the one dry up the other, therefore the lightning is brighter than the sun, softer than water and firmer than hard rock."

At the edge of the glassy sea he sees the martyrs with harps in their hands dedicated to the service of God. Like the Hebrews of old they have passed through their Red Sea and now they stand by the heavenly ocean and sing their song to God who has triumphed gloriously, as Moses and his followers sang their praise to Him who had cast the horse and his rider into the sea (Ex. xv. 1, 21). Although the song has no distinctively Christian features in it, it is fitly called not only the Song of Moses but also the Song of the Lamb; for the great and marvellous works and the righteous acts God has accomplished, are those achieved in the victory He has granted the singers in their conflict with the Beast.

And now the heavenly temple is opened and from it come seven angels robed in white linen<sup>1</sup> and

<sup>1</sup> The alternative reading "stone" accepted in R.V. is so impossible that no textual evidence would justify its acceptance. Even if the original autograph were accessible and found to contain it, we ought to regard it as a mere slip of the pen or an error due to a mistake in writing from dictation. Anyone who

golden girdles. To each of them one of the four living creatures gives a bowl filled with the wrath of the ever-living God. And as in Isaiah's vision the Temple was filled with smoke from the majesty and might of God, so now there arose a smoke so overwhelming that none could enter the temple while the seven plagues were being executed. As compared with the seals and the trumpets, we find formal differences in the arrangement of the bowls. Here the seven plagues are not divided into four and three, nor is there any break between the sixth and the seventh. On the other hand, as Spitta has pointed out, the seven bowls are closely parallel to the seven trumpets. This will be clearly seen if the two series are placed side by side for comparison.

<i>Trumpets.</i>	<i>Bowls.</i>
1.—Hail and fire mingled with blood.	Sore.
2.—Sea turned into blood.	Sea turned into blood.
3.—Rivers and fountains made bitter.	Rivers and fountains turned into blood.
4.—Darkness.	Scorching heat.
5.—Demon locusts.	Darkness in the kingdom of the beast.
6.—Demon horsemen from Euphrates.	Drying up of Euphrates and gathering of kings at Har-magedon.
7.—Lightnings, voices, thunders, earthquake, hail.	Lightnings, voices, thunders, earthquake, fall of the cities, hail.

has had much actual experience, knows how frequently just such blunders occur, and how easy it is to pass them over in his own writing or that of his amanuensis. The best that can be said for it is said by W.H., but the argument is adequately met by Swete.



The resemblances are very striking and the differences can for the most part be explained. In each series it will be noticed that the description has been to a considerable extent modelled on the account of the plagues of Egypt. The author observed that the hail and lightning of the first trumpet were repeated in the seventh. Accordingly he substitutes for it the immediately preceding plague of Egypt so that the first bowl brings a sore. In place of the demon locusts, which it is thought he regarded as unsuitable to Rome, he substitutes darkness which in Egypt followed the plague of locusts. Then for the fourth plague darkness became unsuitable, so scorching heat was substituted. But in both cases it is the heavenly bodies that are affected, in the one case sun, moon and stars, in the other case the sun. Explicit reference is added in the bowls to the political conditions, the imperial power of Rome, the Parthian invasion, the fall of the cities. And just as Pharaoh's heart was hardened, so the bowls do not bring men to repentance, but three times we read of the blasphemy against God which was called forth by the plagues.

The fifth bowl is poured on the throne of the Beast, by which we are probably to understand Rome; though possibly the alternative suggested by Porter may be correct, that "the demon representative of Rome is in mind and that a preliminary plague in the realm of Satan is intended." But

this is improbable, since Satan's realm is already one of darkness and the victims of the plague are men not devils. It is strange that the victims should gnaw their tongues for pain. It is hardly likely that the darkness is itself represented as painful, but it may well make the sense of the pains from which they are already suffering more acute.

The sixth bowl is poured out on the Euphrates. It has been suggested that, since Babylon is the apocalyptic name for Rome, the Euphrates may stand for the Tiber. But this is in itself improbable and the reference to a river in the West is excluded by the mention of the kings who come from the sun-rising. These kings are gathered together by three unclean spirits that issue from the mouths of the dragon, the Beast and the false prophet. They are unclean demons like frogs in appearance. While the Parthian hosts cross the Euphrates dry-shod, the frog-like demons incite the kings of the whole world to assemble at Har-magedon where the decisive battle will be fought in which God will triumph over them. The name of the place is commonly interpreted as "mountain of Megiddo." We should have expected the plain of Megiddo, for it was there that some of the famous battles of history had been fought ; but the apocalypticist may have been influenced by prophecies which spoke of the destruction of Israel's enemies on the mountains of Palestine. Gunkel argues that the author is here employing a name handed down from ancient

tradition which he himself did not understand. This is of course possible, but the usual view seems preferable.

When the seventh angel poured his bowl upon the air a mighty voice from the throne announced the completion of this series of judgments. In addition to other elemental phenomena an earthquake follows, unprecedented in history. It splits the great city into three parts and lays the cities of the nations in ruins. Babylon is made to drink the wine of God's fierce anger, the islands and the mountains disappear. Hailstones of stupendous weight occasion fresh blasphemies from the impenitent. The great city is probably Rome not Jerusalem, its fate remains to be described in fuller detail

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

### The Scarlet Woman and the Beast with Seven Heads.

THE seventeenth chapter is one of the most important for the determination of the historical problems of the Book. Elsewhere reasons have been given for regarding it as composite in character (p. 39) and its bearing on the problem of date has also been discussed (pp. 80-90). In its present form the chapter depicts Rome under the figure of the woman, and the imperial power under the figure of the Beast. But ancient traditional material seems to be employed in it, and even in its literary form it has probably passed through more than one stage of development. The woman is described as sitting upon many waters and in the vision itself the seer beholds her sitting upon a beast. Rome itself could not be described as situated upon many waters, but this feature was quite appropriate to the literal Babylon and it is, as a matter of fact, derived from the prophecy on Babylon, "O thou that dwellest upon many waters,

abundant in treasures, thine end is come, the measure of thy covetousness" (Jer. li. 13). But the Old Testament is not the only source of the description. The waters are identical with the Beast, in other words both represent in the first instance the Chaos monster. Perhaps at some point in the history of the tradition the woman may have been identified with the actual Babylon. The seven heads and ten horns have appeared already in the vision of the two beasts. Here the seven heads receive a double interpretation, they are the seven hills of Rome and seven Roman emperors. The horns are explained to be ten kings which as yet have received no kingdom. The waters, which are unsuitable to Rome, receive a new interpretation, they are the peoples over which Rome rules. We have previously seen (pp. 80-90), in considering the difficult passage about the kings, that xvii. 10 was probably written under Vespasian and xvii. 11 under Titus. But there are touches which carry us down to the reign of Domitian, such as the reference to the Beast that is about to come up out of the abyss; and closer observation seems to show that this chapter along with the eighteenth, which should be taken with it, expresses two estimates of Rome. The description of the woman emphasizes in the first instance her luxury and her uncleanness. She is depicted as a gorgeously arrayed Bacchanal. Her purple and scarlet attire are emblems of luxurious living; the cup from which

she drinks and with which she intoxicates the royal partners of her sin is the symbol of her uncleanness. She is branded with the title of shame, like Tyre (Isa. xxiii. 15-18) and Nineveh (Nahum iii. 4); and the Beast, on which she rides, is full of names of blasphemy. And when we turn to the eighteenth chapter it is still for the most part the same note that is struck. She is smitten for the enormity of her sins that have reached to heaven; and these sins are pride and wantonness with which she has infected the kings of the earth, and to gratify which she has squandered her wealth on the world's merchandise. She has bewitched with her sorcery all the nations of the earth, and all these and all the merchants and sailors, who have waxed rich by ministering to her appetites and her vanity, will wail for the irretrievable judgment that has come upon her. The peril of residence in the city is not simply participation in her doom but contamination by her sin. Only rarely in the dirge on the fallen city is there any reference to Rome as having shed the blood of the saints. And this is true also of the seventeenth chapter which contains that reference simply in 6a. In view of the fact that there is independent evidence for regarding the chapter as composite, we may reasonably conclude that the reference to the goblet of Rome as full of abomination and uncleanness and the reference to her as drunken with the blood of the saints belong to different strata. Indeed we



could hardly account for the very scanty mention of Rome as persecutor if the two descriptions had come from the same hand. The emphasis and proportion would surely have been differently distributed.

We may conclude then that in its original form this section of the book predicted the Divine judgment on Rome for her luxury, uncleanness, and arrogance, and described the sorrow at the tragedy which had befallen her, felt by those who had wantoned with her and grown rich through ministering to her sin. Her overthrow seems to the writer a just judgment on her vice, but his attitude is not one of delight that God has avenged His people's wrongs, there is no vindictive triumph over her fate. It is possible that her judgment is directly inflicted by God without human intervention (xviii. 8). This author may well have been a Jew and not a Christian, especially if his work was contained in the little book. Pfeiderer thinks that he wrote in the time of Caligula, and this of course is possible; but since xvii. 10 belongs to the time of Vespasian, and we probably have to recognize an element in the chapter from the reign of Titus and a slight retouching by the final author under Domitian, it is better perhaps to date this original stratum under Vespasian. There is an obvious objection to this that if a writer wrote after Vespasian's armies had destroyed Jerusalem, we should have expected a burning

hatred for Rome instead of the somewhat detached attitude which this writer displays.

This original draft received additions during the reign of Titus. The woman is now drunk not with the wine of her uncleanness but with the blood of the saints, and the Beast makes war upon her and burns her with fire. Nero, who had not died but escaped to the East, returns with the Parthians for the destruction of the city. At first sight the reference to Rome as drunk with the blood of the saints finds its obvious explanation in the horrors of the Neronian persecution and the subsequent execution of Christians at Rome or in the provinces. And no doubt that is the meaning which the passage bears in its present form, as is clear from the reference to the blood of the martyrs of Jesus, and to apostles in xviii. 20. But for the Neronian persecution Nero and not Rome was mainly responsible. It is therefore strange that Nero should be represented as avenging the persecution upon Rome. Accordingly another view is perhaps more probable. The description of Rome as drunk with the blood of the saints might even more fitly have been written by a Jewish writer with reference to the overthrow of Jerusalem by Titus and the bloody punishment inflicted by Rome on the vanquished nation. The feeling of the Jews towards Nero was different from that of the Christians, since Nero was greatly under the influence of Poppaea who was herself addicted to Judaism.

The quarrel of the Jews was with Rome, the quarrel of the Christians was primarily with Nero. It is therefore not improbable that the writer, who revised the original prophecy in the reign of Titus, was a Jew, who saw in the destruction of Rome by the Beast, that is Nero, and the Parthians, God's judgment on the destroyers of Jerusalem. But since we have a reference to the return of Nero from the abyss we must postulate a further revision under Domitian, presumably by the author of the Apocalypse himself. It is he who is responsible for the Christian additions, who represents the Beast as making war on the Lamb, who inserts the references to the blood of the martyrs of Jesus and of the apostles.

On the enumeration of the heads it is not necessary to add anything to what has already been said (pp. 80-90). But it is noteworthy that the Beast seems to be identified with one of the heads. He is described as the Beast that was and is not (xvii. 8), and later the Beast that was and is not is represented as the eighth king and as one of the seven. Originally the reference may have been to the Chaos monster that "was" before Creation, but was vanquished by God at Creation ("is not") and was now to come up out of the abyss. Here of course it is the imperial power, its heads are successive Roman emperors and the whole Beast is so to speak concentrated in the eighth emperor, Nero, who comes back from the Parthians or, as

the later version had it, Nero who is to return from hell. The ten horns are described as ten kings, and since the Beast is identified with the empire, its horns might naturally be identified with Roman administrators just as the heads are with emperors. Accordingly several modern scholars<sup>1</sup> take the horns to be governors of the Roman provinces whom the author expects to join Nero in his assault on Rome. But since the Beast is also identified with an individual emperor, that is Nero, another interpretation of the horns may be preferable. In view of the expectation that Nero would return with the Parthians to attack Rome, it was natural, when he was regarded as the Beast and not simply as one of the heads, to interpret the horns as Parthian rulers.

<sup>1</sup> Notably Mommsen (PRE ii. 198).

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### The Twofold Judgment and the Millennium.

THE seer has seen the vision of the Scarlet Woman riding on the scarlet beast, that is of Rome and the Imperial Power. He has heard the announcement of Rome's overthrow and the prediction of the distress of kings and merchants as they wailed at the downfall of a city so splendid and the loss of a trade so lucrative. He has seen the strong angel symbolize its destruction by casting a mighty stone into the sea. The overthrow has yet to be accomplished but it is not unfitting that at this point he should hear the hallelujah chorus of the vast multitude in heaven, for the righteous doom that had fallen on the sorceress who had corrupted with her fascinations the whole earth and had shed the blood of the saints. Fittingly, here too, the four and twenty elders and the four living creatures fall prostrate before the throne and pay their tribute of adoration. Then once more, in obedience to a mandate from the throne, the hallelujah is repeated since the

Lord God Omnipotent reigneth. The marriage supper of the Lamb is at hand, the occasion of joy ; the Bride has adorned herself for the Bridegroom, and blessed are the guests who are bidden to that feast. Then the seer falls at the feet of the angel to worship him ; but he is sternly rebuked for offering to a fellow-creature the homage that is due to God alone. For, angel though he is, he belongs essentially to the same order as the seer, since both prophet and angel possess the testimony of Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

Now at last the overthrow of the Beast and false prophet is described. The Messiah leads out of heaven the heavenly hosts ; an angel bids the birds come to feast on the flesh of the vanquished ; the Beast, with the kings of the earth and their armies, meets the Messiah and His followers. The Beast and false prophet are cast alive into the lake of fire and brimstone, while their followers are

<sup>1</sup> The clause, "for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" is obscure, and is regarded by several scholars as a gloss. The testimony of Jesus may be the testimony given by Him or that given to Him. In the former case the testimony given by Jesus, the "faithful and true witness" (iii. 14), "who testifies these things" (xxii. 20), is the source from which the prophetic spirit, animating both angel and seer, derives the message which they are inspired to utter. In the latter case testimony to Jesus constitutes the essence of prophetic inspiration, shared by angel and seer alike. This passage and that in xxii. 9 are apparently directed against angel-worship, which is also attacked in the Epistle to the Colossians. In spite of Rendall, Hort, Bousset, and C. A. Scott, there seems to be no substantial reason for detecting such a polemic in the Epistle to the Hebrews.



killed by the sword of the Messiah and all the birds are gorged with their flesh. The section is closely connected with the story of the birth of the Messiah in the twelfth chapter. There the child is caught up to the throne of God immediately after His birth and He disappears from the action of the book till He reappears in this chapter. It is remarkable, however, that the dragon does not reappear in this scene, but only the Beast and the false prophet. We should have anticipated that the conflict with and conquest of the dragon would have been the achievement of the Messiah; but that is not the case. After the Messiah's victory, an angel comes down from heaven, seizes the dragon, and binds him with a great chain, then casts him into the abyss, shuts and seals it, that while he is thus confined he may not deceive the nations. His imprisonment is to last for a thousand years and to be followed by a brief interval of liberty. We have previously learnt that the dragon, after his defeat by Michael, was cast down to the earth, where he rages furiously because he knows that his time is short. This brief interval of three and a half years has now come to an end. There is no reference to any battle on earth between the superhuman powers. It would seem as if, when the hour of his destiny struck, he yielded unresisting to his doom. The release when the thousand years are ended, is regarded by the writer as necessary, "after this he must be loosed for a little time."

The necessity may lie ultimately in the determination of the Divine will; but probably the writer is thinking of the future as already mapped out in the apocalyptic tradition. There is an eschatological programme, to which history must conform. The case is similar to that of the period during which the dragon rages against the faithful. The time, it is true, is short, for it is only three and a half years, and during this interval the dragon cannot be touched. Only when it is passed can he be overthrown. Similarly he must be released, but once more the little time will soon be over and then his final overthrow will come.

This seems to us a very strange forecast. We should naturally anticipate that, once the devil was vanquished and bound, he would not be released to resume his baleful activity. But this conception of a period during which the power of evil is broken, to be followed by a brief period when it is re-established, this in its turn to be followed by its complete overthrow and the eternal reign of blessedness, was not the invention of the apocalypticist, though it occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. It is found in Jewish theology and probably originated from a combination of the prediction in the prophets of an earthly Messianic Kingdom with the later conception of a heavenly kingdom. The combination was effected by making the earthly kingdom come first and the heavenly succeed it. But between them there was an

interval, during which evil regained its power. In this way both periods of blessedness were introduced by a victory over evil. We have heathen parallels in which the imprisoned evil powers break loose from their confinement. Thus in the Persian eschatology the dragon is released by Angromainyu; while in the Orphic myth the Titans escape from Tartarus, kill Dionysus and are then consumed by Zeus. The duration of the first period of the suppression of evil was variously reckoned. The thousand years' scheme is probably to be explained on the principle enunciated by the author of the Epistle of Barnabas (ch. xvi.). He asserts that the completion of creation in six days means that in six thousand years the world will come to an end, since the day of the Lord is a thousand years. The Sabbath rest, he says, means "when His Son shall come, and shall abolish the time of the Lawless One and shall judge the ungodly, and shall change the sun and the moon and the stars, then shall He truly rest on the seventh day." It is found at an earlier date in the Secrets of Enoch, xxxiii. It can hardly be questioned that a period of time is intended, and it is very probable that the author means a literal thousand years, even if we do not measure them rigidly "as the years of a hireling." It is fantastic to argue that this period has no relation to time at all, but simply implies the completeness with which Satan is bound.

After the binding of Satan thrones are placed for unnamed occupants who sit upon them, and the execution of judgment is entrusted to them. The martyrs, who had been beheaded for their loyalty and refusal to participate in the worship of the Beast, are raised from the dead and reign with Christ for a thousand years. They share in the first resurrection whereas the rest of the dead are not raised till the millennium is past. This reign is, of course, a reign upon earth.

At the end of the millennium Satan is released, and gathers the nations, Gog and Magog with innumerable hosts, to surround the army of the saints and Jerusalem the beloved city. Fire from heaven destroys his hosts, and he himself is cast into the lake of fire and brimstone to join his servants the Beast and the false prophet, there to be tortured for ever.

On this final overthrow of Satan there follows the vision of the Last Judgment. The dead who had not shared in the first resurrection are given up by the sea, by death and Hades. The books wherein men's deeds are recorded are opened and judgment is pronounced according to their works. The Book of Life also is opened and whoever is not included in it is cast into the lake of fire. It is possible that two ideas stand here in unreconciled juxtaposition; destiny being determined in one case by a man's deeds, in the other by predestination. The Book of Life contains the register of

those who are enrolled as citizens of the New Jerusalem, and inclusion in it might be thought to depend on the eternal counsel of God rather than on a man's deeds. But Paul holds a doctrine of predestination and regards the saints as chosen by God in Christ before the foundation of the world; while he also teaches that men are judged according to the deeds done in the body. He was conscious of no contradiction and it would be hazardous to infer that in our passage two hands can be traced. Death and Hades, who have already appeared at the opening of the fourth seal, are now cast into the lake of fire, a fate here identified with the second death.

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## CHAPTER XXV.

### The New Jerusalem Descends to Earth.

THE closing chapters of the book present difficult critical problems. In particular we have a double account of the descent of the new Jerusalem. But on this rather intricate question we need not linger, since it is doubtful whether any satisfactory analysis can be reached.

The author first predicts the fulfilment of the prophecy, "Behold I create new heavens and a new earth" (Isa. lxxv. 17), which found other echoes in the apocalyptic literature. One feature in the description is of special interest, it is that the sea is no more. This may reflect the ancient attitude towards the sea as the uncongenial element which sets a perilous barrier between land and land, sundering friend from friend, fettering commerce and the mingling of peoples. Moreover the Hebrews from the desert seem always to have felt a certain repugnance to the sea, and the exile of Patmos had reasons of his own for disliking it. But in this description of the new creation the absence of the sea probably rests on another ground. The mutinous ocean tossing and foaming in its fury,



straining to overflow its bounds, yet with waves ever falling back after they had lifted themselves up against heaven, and their lawless encroachment always curbed by the iron hand of God, was associated with the ancient myth of the triumph over Tiamat which preceded the first creation. And now the last things are to be like the first; and as the conquest of the ancient demon of chaos was the prelude to the creation of the world, so now, when God makes new heavens and a new earth, He settles accounts once for all with the Primal Deep.<sup>1</sup>

The seer then beholds the new Jerusalem descend from heaven. The conception of a heavenly Jerusalem is to be found in earlier literature. Apparently it was in existence before the catastrophe which in A.D. 70 overwhelmed the earthly Jerusalem. But it seems not to have been prominent and it was the destruction of the ancient city which gave new significance to the idea.<sup>2</sup> The celestial counter-

<sup>1</sup> I have discussed this more fully in the chapter "The Mutinous Sea" in *Faded Myths*. The commentators quote parallels to the disappearance of the sea from the Sibylline Literature (v. 158f., 447), where it is connected with the burning of the world, from *Assumption of Moses* x. 6, Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris* 7.

<sup>2</sup> Paul in Gal. iv. 25f. contrasts "the Jerusalem which is above" with "the Jerusalem that now is." This is earlier than the destruction of Jerusalem, and the reference in Heb. xii. 22 to "the heavenly Jerusalem" may be so. Mommsen's statement in PRE ii. 197 probably needs qualification. "The foundation of the Apocalypse is indisputably the destruction of the earthly Jerusalem, and the prospect thereby for the first time opened up of its future ideal restoration; in place of the razing of the city which had taken place there cannot possibly be put the mere expectation of its capture."

part would more than make up for that city on which the Jew had lavished such intensity of devotion. The descent of the city implies the abiding presence of God with men and the abolition of sorrow, pain and death. But while the victor receives the inheritance, those who have proved themselves cowards in the conflict shall have their portion in the lake of fire. And this second death shall be the doom of those guilty of idolatry, sorcery, abominable vice, murder and insincerity.

We now pass on to a description of the new Jerusalem, the bride of the Lamb which the seer, standing on a lofty mountain, sees descending from heaven. It is not necessary to repeat the description in detail but there are several points in it which call for mention. In appearance it was clear and radiant, for it was made of pure gold, which unlike the gold of earth had the transparency of glass, and of such gold its streets also were made. Its walls were of jasper pierced by twelve gates of pearl, bearing the names of the twelve tribes, with an angel standing at each gate. Its foundations were of precious stones which were inscribed with the names of the twelve apostles. Its dimensions were enormous, it was a square, the length of each side twelve thousand furlongs (*stadia*) *i.e.*, nearly 1,500 miles. To us such measurements appear fantastic and we are tempted to take refuge in the explanation that the numbers are simply symbolical, though this might not unjustly be regarded as

disguising rather than removing the difficulty. And a symbolical interpretation becomes more plausible when we read that the height also is equivalent to the length and breadth. For thus the new Jerusalem is seen to be a perfect cube and we remember at once that such also was the Holy of Holies. In that case the writer may suggest that the Holy of Holies in the Temple was a reproduction in miniature of the heavenly Jerusalem; or he may wish to suggest that the New Jerusalem would fulfil the same function in the world as the Holy of Holies had fulfilled for the Jews. There God's presence had been manifested in the fullest intensity, since He was thought to be enthroned on the cherubim above the mercy seat. On the other hand the author intends to describe a real city, not some spiritual abstraction; and we should be cautious of introducing symbolism where all else seems to be literally intended. The one feature in the description which makes the literal interpretation difficult is the height; for that the city should be described as nearly 1,500 miles high is not easy to believe. I am accordingly inclined to suspect that the words "and the height" are a scribal addition, made perhaps quite thoughtlessly or almost unconsciously; and this all the more that the first part of the verse simply insists on the equality of the length and the breadth. The figure is chosen as a multiple of twelve which is very prominent in this passage; and there is no reason to suppose that our Oriental

author would see anything extravagant in such dimensions for a city of heavenly origin,<sup>1</sup> wherein God and the Lamb are enthroned, wherein would dwell the innumerable multitudes of the redeemed. And if the measure of the wall, 144 cubits, refers to the height, as is most natural, the great disproportion between a wall about 210 feet high and the city itself nearly 1,500 miles high strongly favours the view that this latter measurement is no part of the original text. In that case the parallelism with the Holy of Holies disappears, and later in the passage God Himself and the Lamb are said to be its Temple, and their radiance illuminates the city, so that no lamp is needed. The nations walk in the light that streams from the city and their tribute is poured into it. For the city though vast in extent does not cover the whole area of the transformed earth and the nations with their kings still live outside of it, including the unclean and those guilty of abominations. These are of course not permitted in the Holy City, which they would defile by their presence ; but all who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life have the freedom of the city and may go in and out at their pleasure.

Down the centre of the street flows from the throne of God the water of life. On each bank there are trees of life<sup>2</sup> with a monthly crop and twelve

<sup>1</sup> Other Jewish descriptions are not so extravagant, but they are extravagant judged by our standards.

<sup>2</sup> "Wood of life" would give the sense better than "tree of life," for the term "tree" while singular, bears here a collective

kinds of fruit. And while the inhabitants of the city drink immortality from the stream and gain it also from feasting on the fruit, the leaves themselves have healing efficacy and cure the ills from which humanity still suffers. But within the city itself there is no curse, for there God and the Lamb are on their throne, His servants render Him priestly service and it is their bliss to behold His face. They bear His name on their foreheads, God is their everlasting life and they reign with Him for ever.

Here then the vision comes to its close, and the section of the Book which follows corresponds to the introduction with which the Book opens. Once more the note of urgency is struck and we hear it again and again. The things proclaimed are shortly to come to pass, and Christ is coming quickly, in answer to the prayer of the Spirit who inspires the prophets in the Christian assembly and in answer to the longing of the Bride.<sup>1</sup> And when He comes, it will be to give each the due reward of his deeds; hence human character will soon be

sense. Cf. the lovely lines in the old version of "Jerusalem, my happy home:"

"Quite through the streets with silver sound  
The flood of life doth flow,  
Upon whose banks on every side  
The wood of life doth grow."

<sup>1</sup> In the clause "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come," the entreaty is addressed to the absent Christ. It is not, as is often supposed, an exhortation bidding the sinner come to Christ.

fixed, whether unrighteousness and uncleanness or righteousness and holiness. Blessed indeed are those whose robes are washed,<sup>1</sup> who have the right to enter the city and eat the tree of life. For the sinful are doomed to be excluded from the city. And since the Judge is already at the gate and the consummation is so near at hand, the seer is forbidden to seal the Book; he is at once to publish it. A threat is uttered that whoever adds to the prophecy will be smitten with the plagues predicted in the Book, and whoever omits anything from it will be deprived of his share in the Holy City and the tree of life. With a renewed promise from Jesus of His speedy return, to which the seer responds with his fervent "Amen," and with a benediction on the saints the Book comes to an end.

<sup>1</sup> Bousset prefers the alternative reading, "Blessed are they that do his commandments" (so A.V.). He believes that the reading adopted by the Revisers, "Blessed are they that wash their robes" has intruded here from vii. 14. Swete considers the decision to be not altogether easy, but he adopts "wash their robes" with some confidence, since the documentary evidence decidedly favours it, and, apart from 1 John v. 2, the Johannine phrase is not "do the commandments" but "keep the commandments." J. Weiss, Moffatt and C. A. Scott also accept this reading.

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

### The Permanent Value of the Book.

WHEN we are estimating the value of the Apocalypse we are thinking of the Book as it stands. We may fully recognize that the author has drawn upon oral tradition or incorporated written sources; but these cannot be reconstructed with any certainty and it is our duty to take the work as it is and ask how we may profit by it. We must deal fairly by it, refusing to be unduly prejudiced by its uncongenial form. To us apocalyptic is apt to seem remote and bizarre, its imagery pretentious or grotesque. We are out of sympathy with its attempts to map the incalculable future, and the thought of a fixed apocalyptic scheme to which history must conform has grown strange. We realize also that events have followed a course other than the writer anticipated, and may be tempted impatiently to dismiss the Book as worthless. Its temper is apt to strike us unfavourably, we may be repelled by its fierce intolerance of false teachers, its ruthless reprobation of the weakness which could not stand the strain of

persecution, its virulent hatred of the pagan world, its rapturous exultation in the prospect of its speedy overthrow.

It is easy for us in the twentieth century to do the author an injustice. A Biblical writer, like every other writer, speaks first of all to his own time ; and he clothes his message in the form which seems best fitted for his purpose. Apocalypse was a popular type of religious literature, and the author's contemporaries would not find the Book foreign or uncongenial. Modern readers in Western lands, whose taste has been formed by Greek models and who have an instinctive antipathy to loud colours and extravagant rhetoric, must allow for the luxuriant orientalism of writer and readers. And the literary form has real merits of its own. Mr. Leckie says : " Apocalyptic forms belong to the same order as sacrament and ritual, architecture, music and poetry, and share with these the invaluable gift of expressing religious faith without unduly defining it."<sup>1</sup> And although the interpretation of the Book owes not a little to the recognition that it belongs to a literary type and to illustration from other members of its class, it is also the case that some readers are much more impressed by the differences than by the resemblances. The style of the Revelation is unequal and the interest is not throughout sustained at the same level ; but no one will deny that it contains passages of exceptional

<sup>1</sup> *The World to Come and Final Destiny*, p. 26.

beauty and power, or that, once we have been able to put ourselves at the author's point of view, the drama has its thrilling moments and at times moves us to the depths. We cannot, it is true, make its detailed predictions coincide with history ; but the principles which are clothed in this temporary dress are of abiding validity. The fierceness of the Book finds its explanation in the conditions. Some of the passages to which exception may most justly be taken were probably not of Christian origin, nevertheless they have been incorporated by the Christian author. His situation called for the more strenuous virtues. We may criticize his impatience and intolerance, but we must remember that he anticipated an outbreak of persecution from which few Christians would escape. In this deadly struggle the cowards would get no quarter. The lake of fire the author believed to await all who worshipped the Beast, and apostasy under whatever pressure was an unpardonable sin. If he is merciless to the fearful it is partly no doubt that he fails in sympathetic appreciation of the overwhelming pressure of their temptations, but partly that he thinks with horror of the fate to which their lack of courage may condemn them. And he encourages no wild dreams of resistance by force. Patience alone is to be the victim's armour and weapon ; again and again reward is promised "to him that overcometh," but he overcomes only by passive endurance, however intolerable the

strain. If the writer is inflexible towards false teaching it is because of the immorality and the compromise with heathenism which it involves. It is quite true that the Book is marred by vindictiveness, and the lurid descriptions of the fate which is to overtake the heathen are an unpleasing feature in it. The souls of the martyrs cry to God impatiently to avenge their blood, and they are bidden wait for the fulfilment of their desire till the tale of martyrs is complete. When Babylon is overthrown we read that God has avenged the blood of His servants at her hand. Her smoke goes up for ever and ever. Appalling judgments come upon the world with the seals, the trumpets and the bowls; the bowls are said to be full of the wrath of God. When the winepress of His wrath is trodden, the blood flows from the human victims, reaching to the bridles of the horses and streaming over the land to an extent of sixteen hundred furlongs. The Messiah is said to tread the winepress of the fierceness of God's wrath, to smite the nations with a sharp sword and rule them with a rod of iron. When His enemies are slain, the birds are summoned to the great supper of God to feast, till they are glutted with it, on the flesh of kings and warriors and horses and riders and the flesh of all men. The Beast and the false prophet are cast alive into the lake of fire and brimstone and there too the devil is tormented with them day and night for ever. There also are death and Hades

and all whose names are not in the Book of Life. The worshippers of the Beast drink the unmingled wine of God's wrath and are tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb, the smoke of their torment goes up for ever, and they have no rest day nor night.

These passages, especially when detached from their context and collected together, are likely to repel the modern reader. It is not so much the descriptions in themselves, appalling though they are ; it is the tone of exultation in which the fate of the heathen and especially of the persecutors is proclaimed. We should not forget, however, that the Revelation is relatively sober in its description of future punishment as we can readily see if we compare the Apocalypse of Peter. The author is saying in his way that the judgment of God upon sin is certain and inflexibly severe. And we cannot doubt that some who were tempted to quail in presence of the Beast found new springs of courage in the sternness of the author's warning.

And now having recognized those elements in the Book which do not appeal to the modern mind, we may dwell on those qualities in it which are of value to ourselves.

The seven letters stand by themselves and if they have their limitations, their value is perhaps more widely recognized than that of any portion of the Book. For though it is the definite churches, as they were when the author wrote, with which

he is concerned, and not the universal Church or that Church as it passes through seven successive stages of its earthly pilgrimage, yet the faults and excellences which are rebuked or commended are characteristic of churches and Christians at all times. And since they are written for the most part in plain language, dealing with practical issues and coming close to men's everyday life, they have always been found rich in edification by preachers and readers, full as they are of warning and encouragement, of threatening and of promise. And to some other portions of the Book men instinctively turn, notably to the closing chapters with their glowing description of the golden city. But there is much in the Book which for the reader who is no specialist is sealed with seven seals. And even when the seals have been broken, the problems with which the author deals and the perils which confronted the Church appear so remote, that the value of the Book seems to lie only in its memorable phrases and in such passages as are immediately intelligible to all. Moreover the non-fulfilment of the author's expectations seems to reduce to vanishing point the value of his prophecy.

The fact that the writer handles a specific historical situation and that events did not develop according to his forecasts, should not blind us to the real significance of the Book or diminish our sense of its permanent value. The Book has for its background a time of crisis. Plague follows



plague in quick succession. The judgments of God fall with pitiless ruin on an idolatrous and impenitent world. Before the Church stand the dread, unavoidable alternatives, apostasy or martyrdom. But the Church is itself infected with the spirit of slackness and compromise and too easy a tolerance. The spirit of the author rises to the challenge. He knows no half measures, has no tolerance for the half-hearted. The old cry sounds out, Choose ye this day whom ye will serve, God or Cæsar. In their decision is involved the choice between martyrdom and the lake of fire. His courage is magnificent, his faith amazing. The small sect of outlaws awaits without dismay the onslaught of the Beast. There is no misgiving as to the issue; God is on their side, they march behind the banner of the Lamb. Their certainty of God finds triumphant expression again and again. The opening vision makes the standpoint clear. Through all the tangled perplexities we know from the outset that Infinite Wisdom moves surely to its goal, that however overwhelming seems the might of evil, the righteous God will crush it at the appointed time. God is on His throne, the Omnipotent has not abdicated, though chaos may seem to have come back again and the cause of righteousness to be irretrievably lost. And soon the truth will be manifest, the kingdom of the world will become the kingdom of our God and His Christ and He shall reign for ever and ever. Soon the triumphant

song will ring through the universe "Hallelujah ! for the Lord our God, the Omnipotent, reigneth."

And this faith in God is matched by faith in the Lamb. He alone has been able to take the book of destiny and break its seven seals. He, the First and the Last, and the Living One, had died, and achieved redemption through His blood. He is the Lamb standing as it had been slain. But the gates of Hades had not prevailed against Him and kept Him prisoner. He had come back from the realm of death and now was alive for evermore and held in His pierced hand the keys of death and of Hades. Hence just as we know from the first that God is enthroned above all the obscurities and turmoil of earth, so we know that the triumph of the Lamb has been already achieved, though all appearance seems to contradict it. The riddle of the future has been deciphered by the Lamb, for He knows and has realized in His sacrificial death those deep underlying principles which really control the course of history. Hence His followers march through tribulation and martyrdom to certain and decisive victory. Even the intensity of the persecution, which is soon to burst in full fury upon them, is a ground of hope ; it will mean that the dragon has been defeated and cast out of heaven and that he rages so violently upon earth since he knows that his time is short.

And if the Church can sustain its courage by its certainty of God and of Christ, it may find in the

hope of the future unfailing springs of consolation. Some elements may not appeal to us, the binding of Satan for a thousand years and his subsequent release, or the first resurrection limited to the martyrs, or the vast golden city literally descending out of heaven. These thoughts bear upon them the stamp of their age, and their justification is that they conveyed the truth in forms which appealed to the time. What is of value to us is the author's undaunted conviction that the evils from which our world suffers are doomed to pass away and that here on earth the Kingdom of God is to be established. Sorrow and pain have vanished, death and the desolation which it brings; life is blighted by no curse, God is present with His people, they serve Him and see His face and live in His light. And if we at last realize that the New Jerusalem is to be slowly built by men from earthly foundations and that long ages may be spent in rearing it, with heavy cost of labour and tears, of agony and blood, yet the New Jerusalem for us also comes down out of Heaven from God, for He grants the ideal which is the inspiration of the builders and the vision of that pattern in the Mount after which it must be fashioned.

The value of the Book lies not only in its message, when we have translated it and adapted it to our own need, it lies also in its literary power. The truths it utters may be precious for their own sake, but the value of the substance cannot make us

indifferent to the form. Uttered in commonplace and nerveless language they lose immeasurably in the force of their appeal. And even trivial truths may profoundly move us by the magic of their expression. They touch our emotions and they brace our will. Their ringing note comes to us like the blast of one of the seven trumpets, rousing us from our apathy, rebuking our slackness, filling us with new courage for the conflict. But the writer is not simply the rigid prophet of discipline, pitiless to the weakness or the cowardice of those who feel themselves unequal to the conflict which confronts them. He is the master of a music sweet and soothing like that of the heavenly harpers. And age after age men and women, passing through great tribulation or desolate from some sore bereavement, have turned to this Book for new strength and consolation, and have found it as they have read of the countless hosts who passed from rivers of blood to fountains of living water, from the ruthless cruelty of men to the healing pity of God. And they think with longing and with hope of that blessed future in which the heart will never be hungry nor the spirit athirst, when they shall dwell in the gracious shadow of God and His tender hand shall wipe all tears from their eyes.

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## APPENDIX.

### Earlier Denials of the Unity.

So far as I know, Evanson was the first to deny the unity of the Apocalypse. This was in *The Dissonance of the Four Generally Received Evangelists and the Evidence of their Respective Authenticity Examined* (1792). The book is, I believe, scarce (I have seen no copy but my own). Schweitzer says: "Further information regarding this, as it seems, rather rare book would be desirable" (*Paul and his Interpreters* p. 121). Evanson regarded the Apocalypse as a genuine work of John, but the seven letters and apparently the introductory vision, Rev. i. 9-20, as spurious. His discussion is brief (pp. 284-286) and his arguments not weighty, though he puts his finger on one real difficulty. Part of his case rests on the now abandoned belief that the Apocalypse was earlier than the Pauline Epistles. His line of argument is as follows. The Introduction says that the things shortly to come to pass were signified to John by the angel of Jesus Christ, and agreeably to this after the beginning of the vision in the fourth chapter an angel is the constant mystagogue of the Apostle through every scene. But immediately after this declaration we have "a vision in which not an angel sent by Jesus Christ but Jesus Christ Himself is represented as the sole personage of the vision, appearing under a very extraordinary figure, attended with very extraordinary emblems, for no other purpose that I can discover than to condemn the heresy of the Nicolaitanes and those who scrupled not to eat things offered to idols." Since the original book of the Apocalypse must have been written before Paul's genuine Epistles, "because in them he several times refers to it," the seven letters cannot be genuine, because he spoke of eating things offered to idols as innocent in itself and knew nothing of these disciples of Nicolaus, "though these seven churches

were all of his own planting; and though these *visionary* Epistles represent the heresy as subsisting at the time when they were written." Besides, the prophetic element in them is absolutely false, for the churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia have been involved in the same calamities as the other churches, "and have had their candlesticks removed out of their places and supplanted by the lamps of Mahomed." Besides, these and all the other churches of Asia united under the denomination of the Greek church to form the predicted apostasy; "and by means of an hierarchy established by the emperor Constantine, become, at no very distant period, the first grand object of the chief prediction of this very Apocalypse."

Evanson regarded miracle as necessary to guarantee Divine revelation and for later ages prophecy was the only supernatural proof. The Apocalypse accordingly he believed to be highly important in virtue of its prophetic character, and saw in the French Revolution a fulfilment of what it had prophesied. I presume it is to this that Mr. J. M. Robertson alludes when he says, "Evanson's ultra-orthodox acceptance of the Apocalypse is significant of his limitations" (*A Short History of Free Thought*<sup>3</sup> ii. 203). But in view of his criticism of the seven letters, "ultra-orthodox" is not the most fortunate description.

Vogel's work, published 1811-1816, I have not seen. According to the account by Dr. E. C. Moore (JBL x. 30), he assumed, on the ground of differences in style and mode of representation, that there were two authors who also had themselves worked at different times on the parts of the book attributed to them. These writers were the Apostle John and the Presbyter John, the latter of whom afterward, possibly with the consent of the Apostle, worked over the whole book. Bousset gives the four divisions made by Vogel as follows: i. 1-8, i. 9-iii. 22, iv.-xi., xii.-xxii.

Bleek in 1820 put his finger on the want of connexion between xi. and xii., and held that the work was written by the Presbyter John, who combined iv.-xi. and xii.-xxii., the former of which was written before the destruction of Jerusalem and had reference mainly to the Holy City, whereas the latter, referring mainly to Rome, was written after the destruction of Jerusalem. At first he supposed that the author might originally have completed the prophecy after xi. on the same lines as he had followed up to that point, but subsequently cancelled the original ending replacing it by xii.-xxii. Later he thought that the prophecy was for a time left incomplete at the end of



xi. and subsequently completed on a different plan. Finally, however, he considered that there was no need to regard the prophecy as written at different periods. His original discussion is to be found in his article, "Beitrag zur Kritik und Deutung der Offenbarung Johannes," in *Berliner theologische Zeitschrift* II. 240ff.

In his posthumous *Einleitung ins Neue Testament* (published in 1845), Schleiermacher expressed the opinion that Bleek's article of 1820 had made the most important pronouncement on the unity of the Apocalypse. He went beyond Bleek, however, in his sense of the disconnected character of the various parts of the book. He thinks we can hardly find any other solution than that a medley of detached visions have been put together which were not originally contemplated as a unity. The unity of authorship he does not deny. He cannot accept the view that the visions were composed by several authors and put together by one person, on the ground that the name of John stood at the beginning and the end.

That Schwegler regarded Rev. i.-iii. as a later addition has been mentioned already (p. 78).

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